

A CENTURY OF MENNONITE BRETHREN

MISSION THINKING, 1885-1984

by

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SUMMARY

After laying out the parameters of the study in the introductory chapter, I have sought to establish the ecclesiological legacy of the Mennonite Brethren within the sixteenth-century Anabaptist/Mennonite movement. This places the Brethren along with other Mennonite groups on the historical map of the Free Church tradition (Chapters 2-3).

Through centuries of persecution and oppression, the Mennonites dispersed to many countries of the world, including Russia. Here they developed an ethnoreligious orthodoxy, focusing more on institutional maintenance than on missionary outreach until the 1830s when spiritual renewal began to stir among dry bones. In the midst of that revival was born the Mennonite Brethren Church in 1860 (Chapters 4-5).

Inspired by their experience of new life in Christ and stimulated by Pietists, Moravians, and Baptists, the Brethren emerged as a vigorous missionary church, first in Russia, then also in America and other countries of the world. They have expressed their missionary zeal by preaching the gospel of Christ and serving people in need, at first spontaneously, then more intentionally. The price they paid was high, often that of a martyr witness, especially in Russia (Chapters 6-7).

In 1885, they began to form foreign mission structures. In the spirit of the times, the Brethren have engaged in home mission and foreign mission, Indian mission and Jewish mission, children's mission and city mission. In the course of a century they have missionarily expanded to twenty-seven countries, commissioned more than 800 missionaries, and have a current annual budget of over five million dollars (Chapters 6-9, 11).

The focus of this study is more a critical reflection of the philosophy than of the history of Mennonite Brethren mission. Since the Mennonite Brethren understand themselves as the Church in mission, I have sought to analyze their mission structures, their sustaining mission forces--such as denominational organizations, personnel and financial resources--as well as their theology, philosophy, and relationships of mission (Chapters 10-13).

The final chapter is an appraisal of achievements and a challenge for further studies.

A CENTURY OF MENNONITE BRETHREN
MISSION THINKING, 1885-1984

VOLUME I

"I declare that

A CENTURY OF MENNONITE BRETHREN

MISSION THINKING, 1885-1984

is my own work and that all the sources that I have used
or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means
of complete references."

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PART ONE

An Adventure:
Laying Out the Parameters

Chapter 1

FOCUS OF THIS STUDY

Introduction

The church's primary reason for existence is to be a missionary people in the world with a theological orientation on the Kingdom of God. The Mennonite Brethren Church has historically shared in that high calling and awesome responsibility, and must continue to do so as long as it wants to be an integral part of the witnessing people of God in this world. This conviction has motivated me to embark on the adventure of investigating the shaping forces and components of Mennonite Brethren mission thinking.

In this introductory chapter I want to spell out the essence of the study by delineating (a) concepts and terms, (b) nature and scope, (c) thesis and objectives, (d) methodology and resources, (e) style and structure, and (f) need and validity of the same.

Concepts and Terms

In order to establish a degree of linguistic and epistemological consistency it is imperative at the outset of this study to define frequently recurring concepts. Because of the nature of the resources used, not all inconsistencies can be eliminated; but they can be reduced to a minimum.

Denominational Concepts

Freely borrowing from ecclesiastical tradition, the Mennonite Brethren have forged a language of their own on the anvil of history. In the process of development the forgers have not always exercised sufficient caution, and specific terms may be unclear to those outside the group. Therefore, group definition of selected denominational concepts is of paramount importance.

Believers' Church. Along with other denominational groups of the free church movement,¹ the Mennonite Brethren stand in the Believers' Church tradition with a strong orientation in Kingdom theology. That is close to what Luther called die dritte Art, or the third type of church composed of those "who want to be Christians in earnest." Unfortunately, he aborted that vision before it ever came to fruition.² The Anabaptists carried it out.

I am using the term Believers' Church as synonymous with the exclusive corpus Christi. Its ecclesiological orientation is less creedal and sacramental in character than the ecclesiologies of the inclusive corpus Christianum represented by Reformed, Lutheran, Anglican, or Roman Catholic traditions. Yet it shares with these traditions those theological convictions that call men and women to be Kingdom people under the Lord Christ.

The operational principles³ of the Believers' Church help to elucidate the concept: (a) repentance, conversion, and new birth experience; (b) voluntary decision to become a church member; (c) obedience to biblical teaching regarding ethical life style and Christian mission; (d) love and peace witness in the midst of conflict; (e) crossbearing and suffering as a way of discipleship under Christ's Lordship; (f) separation and holiness in attitudinal and relational rather than in spatial and geographical terms; (g) the priesthood of all

¹ Gunnar Westin, Der Weg der freien christlichen Gemeinden durch die Jahrhunderte (Kassel: Oncken, 1956), pp. 39-155; Donald F. Durnbaugh, The Believers' Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism (New York: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 8-21, 39-93.

² Martin Luther, "The German Mass and order of Service," in Luther's Works, American ed., vol. 7: Liturgy and Hymns, ed. Ulrich S. Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955), p. 64.

³ I have outlined these principles in my book, Christian Conversion in Context (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1980), pp. 167-174. Cf. J. Lawrence Burkholder, "The Anabaptist Vision of Discipleship," in The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision. A sixtieth tribute in honor of Harold S. Bender, ed. Guy F. Hersherberger (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1962), pp. 135-151.

believers serving both church and world without distinction between laity and ordained clergy, and (h) the Lutheran principle of sola Scriptura, common to most Protestant groups.

Conference. The Mennonite Brethren drafted their first Constitution for registration purposes in 1900, and were subsequently incorporated in the State of Kansas as "The American Mennonite Brethren Mission Union." The designation was borrowed from the American Baptist Missionary Union with whom the Brethren in Russia had established a cooperative relationship for mission in India, as I will discuss in Chapter 7.

The name, however, was too restrictive, and in 1909 was officially changed to "The Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America." But that, too, proved to be inadequate for a denomination that is congregational in its ecclesiological orientation and international in missionary function. Therefore, in 1963 the denomination adopted the present name, "The General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches." The record states:

When we as Mennonite Brethren use the word "conference" in the official designation of ourselves as a brotherhood, the idea we have in mind and convey to others is that we are an association of churches. Specifically, according to the historic Mennonite Brethren concept of this term, we are an association of churches functioning autonomously in the administration of local affairs but banded together in voluntary interdependence for the purpose of mutual strengthening and co-operative action in matters of common spiritual heritage and mission under the headship of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In this connotation the word "conference" has reference to the permanent organizational unity or oneness of Mennonite Brethren churches thus associated.⁴

It should be noted that the congregations in Canada and the United States are organized in provincial and district conferences respectively. The provincial conferences make up

⁴ Yearbook of the 49th Session of the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, 1963), p. 44. Hereafter cited as GCY (General Conference Yearbook) followed by the appropriate date and page.

the Canadian Conference and the district conferences form the United States Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. Each smaller unit may be involved in various mission endeavors within designated boundaries and many useful ideas could be gleaned from the records of these regional conferences. But that is not the purpose of this study. All major mission endeavors and their philosophical and theological foundations discussed here operate within the parameters of the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches. Therefore the term "General Conference" or simply "Conference" (with capital C) will here be used to cover any one of the three historically official self-designations of the Mennonite Brethren Churches.

Convention. The concept "Convention" will occasionally be used synonymously with conference (lower case) in the sense of an assembly or meeting of churches. This means the periodic, official gathering of delegates from various local congregations for inspirational and legislative purposes. It may pertain to an annual district assembly in the United States, to a yearly provincial conference in Canada, to a national Area Convention of either one of the countries, to a triennial conference with delegates from all congregations on the American continent, or even to an expanded International Mennonite Brethren Fellowship with representatives from all over the world.⁵

Each Convention within a district, province, or area is responsible to deal with issues pertaining to its designated region. Matters touching life and mandate of the Conference include world mission, theological and practical training, contemporary issues, and stewardship concerns. These are brought by the various boards before the delegates at the Triennial Convention for discussion, ratification, or approval.

⁵ The first such International Mennonite Brethren Fellowship is scheduled to convene in February 1988, in Curitiba, Brazil.

Boards, committees, and commissions. An official document of 1963 defines the first two in terms of function:

The chief distinction between a board and a committee employed in the Conference constitution is that a board actually administers and operates a Conference activity whereas a committee serves on a consultative, informal, coordinating, and reporting basis.⁶

In the present phase of its organization, the Conference is composed of seven Boards: the Board of Missions and Services, Board of Trustees, Board of Education, Board of Reference and Counsel, Board of Christian Literature, Board of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, and the Board of Mass Media. Committees are elected at the Convention or appointed by the Board of Reference and Counsel to carry out the Conference mandates. In addition, the Conference elects, or a board appoints, a commission to perform specific functions within a given time.

Missiological Concepts

The Mennonite Brethren find a more kindred missionary spirit in such organizations as the Interdenominational Foreign Mission Association (IFMA) and the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association (EFMA) than in those counterparts which are aligned with the World Council of Churches (WCC). This orientation is reflected by the kind of mission language used in MB literature. Since MB mission vocabulary is confined to the denomination's tradition, I feel compelled to introduce selected terms of extraordinary missiological usefulness and thereby expand the linguistic horizon of my church's present generation.

Missionary dimension and missionary intention. Hans-Werner Gensichen has devised a useful linguistic couplet to clarify the mission of the church in the world when he talks about

⁶ Constitution of the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches ([Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House], 1963), p. 31. For an updated policy on the function of boards, committees, and commissions see Constitution and Bylaws of the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches, adopted in 1981.

"dimension" and "intention."⁷ This means, as David Bosch notes, that while both essence and action of the church must have a missionary dimension, they do not always have a missionary intention.

To put it differently: the Church's entire nature is missionary but she is not, in all her activities, explicitly aimed at the world. The Church must in all circumstances be "missionary", but she is not in every moment "missionising".⁸

The missionary dimension is an integral part of the character of God's people gathered for worship and fellowship, preaching and teaching, or any other edifying purpose. They declare what God is doing among them and through them and thereby become a centripetal force of attraction to the world. This is the missionary dimension of the church.

But there is also the missionary intention, which is the implementation of the dimension. This dynamic usually accompanies a renewal movement that breaks through the status quo and spills over into the world. While the missionary dimension may allow God's people to rest comfortably on the pews within the four walls of a church building, the missionary intention takes them decidedly on a missionizing journey into the unmissionized world.⁹

Mission as sentness. Mission as Sendung is the act of sending and the character of being sent. To be sent implies movement; it means to be intentionally mobile. Jesus compared

⁷ For a comprehensive definition of these concepts see Hans-Werner Gensichen, Glaube für die Welt: Theologische Aspekte der Mission (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1971), pp. 168-174, 244-249; cf. David J. Bosch, Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective (Atlanta: John Knox, 1980), pp. 98-99, 189, 199-200; Lesslie Newbigin, "Cross-Currents in Ecumenical and Evangelical Understanding of Mission," International Bulletin of Missionary Research 6 (October 1982), 149-150.

⁸ Bosch, Witness, pp. 199-200.

⁹ Cf. Newbigin, "Cross-Currents," p. 150; Gensichen, Glaube für die Welt, pp. 248-249; D. T. Niles, Upon the Earth: The Mission of God and the Missionary Enterprise of the Churches (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962), p. 76.

the way he was sending his own disciples into the world with the manner in which God the Father had sent him into the world (Figure 1; cf. John 17:18, 20:21).¹⁰ Mission as sentness includes four fundamental components: (a) the sender who has authority to send; (b) the sent one who obeys the orders of the sender; (c) the assignment entrusted to the one sent; and (d) purpose and goal of sentness. The act of sending is a fundamental expression of the missionary church.

Crossing frontiers. Bengt Sundkler has defined mission as the church crossing frontiers.¹¹ That means that there are fences, boundaries, and barriers that must be crossed in order to missionize. I am using this concept throughout this study as it applies to Mennonite Brethren mission thinking. The Mennonite people lived for centuries in a sociocultural ghetto. But when revival struck, they quickly learned the meaning of crossing frontiers in order to witness of the grace and greatness of God (Figure 2).¹²

Institution and movement. One way of looking at these concepts is simply to define them. The term "institution" refers primarily to a socioreligious entity with strong ecclesiastical underpinnings. An institution is highly organized by virtue of its own design in charter, bylaws, creeds, traditions, leadership patterns and decision-making authority. The purpose is to carry out its perceived calling in the world. Institution denotes permanence and is usually less comfortable with change than with preserving the acquired status quo in which it finds security and contentment. In its missionary endeavor the institution tends to be more dimensional and less intentional.

¹⁰ Hans Kasdorf, It's Sunrise in World Mission: A Vision Statement from the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary (Fresno: Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, 1984), p. 7.

¹¹ Bengt Sundkler, The World of Mission, tr. Eric J. Sharpe (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 56-66.

¹² Kasdorf, It's Sunrise, p. 9.

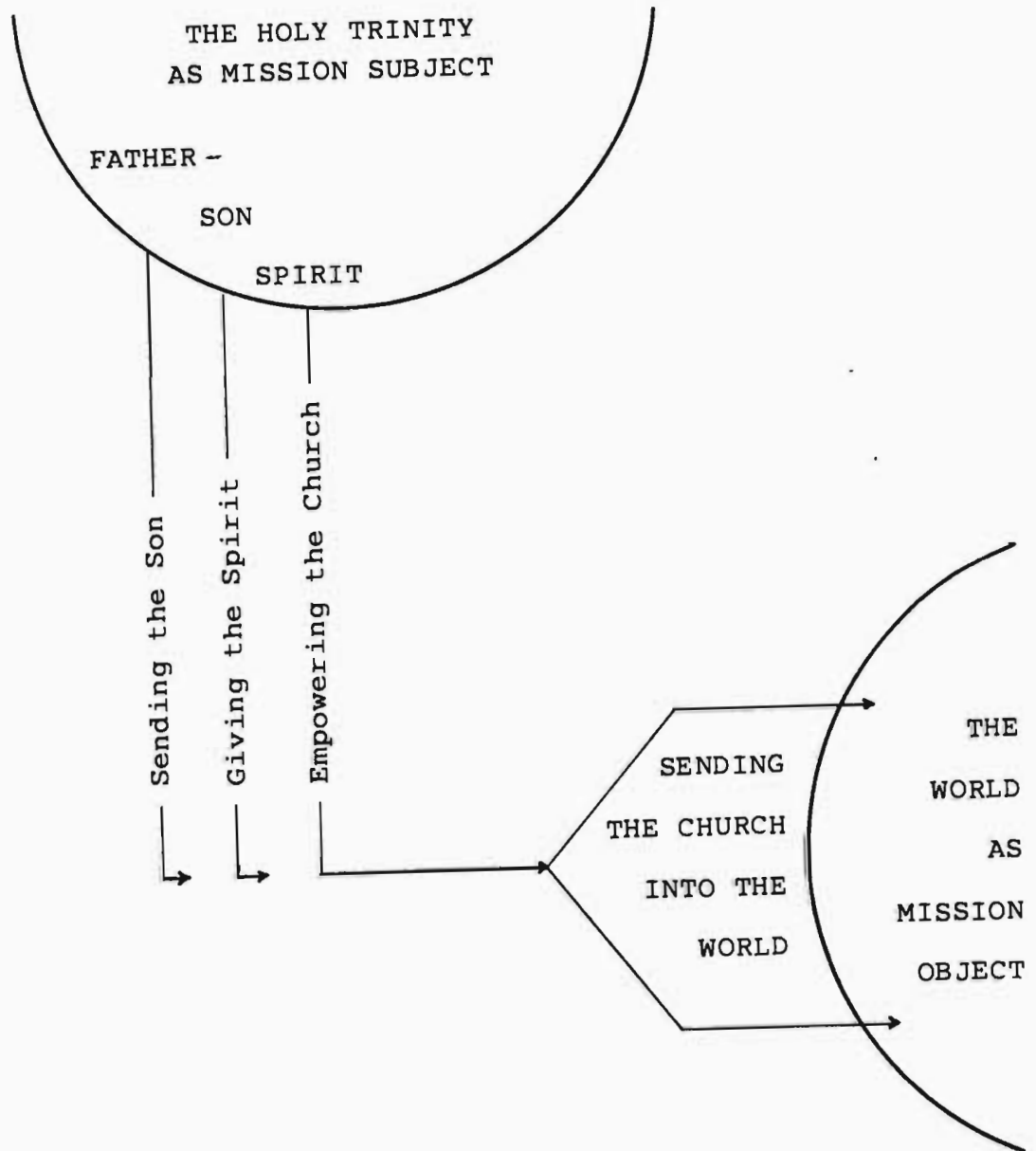


Figure 1
Mission as Sentness

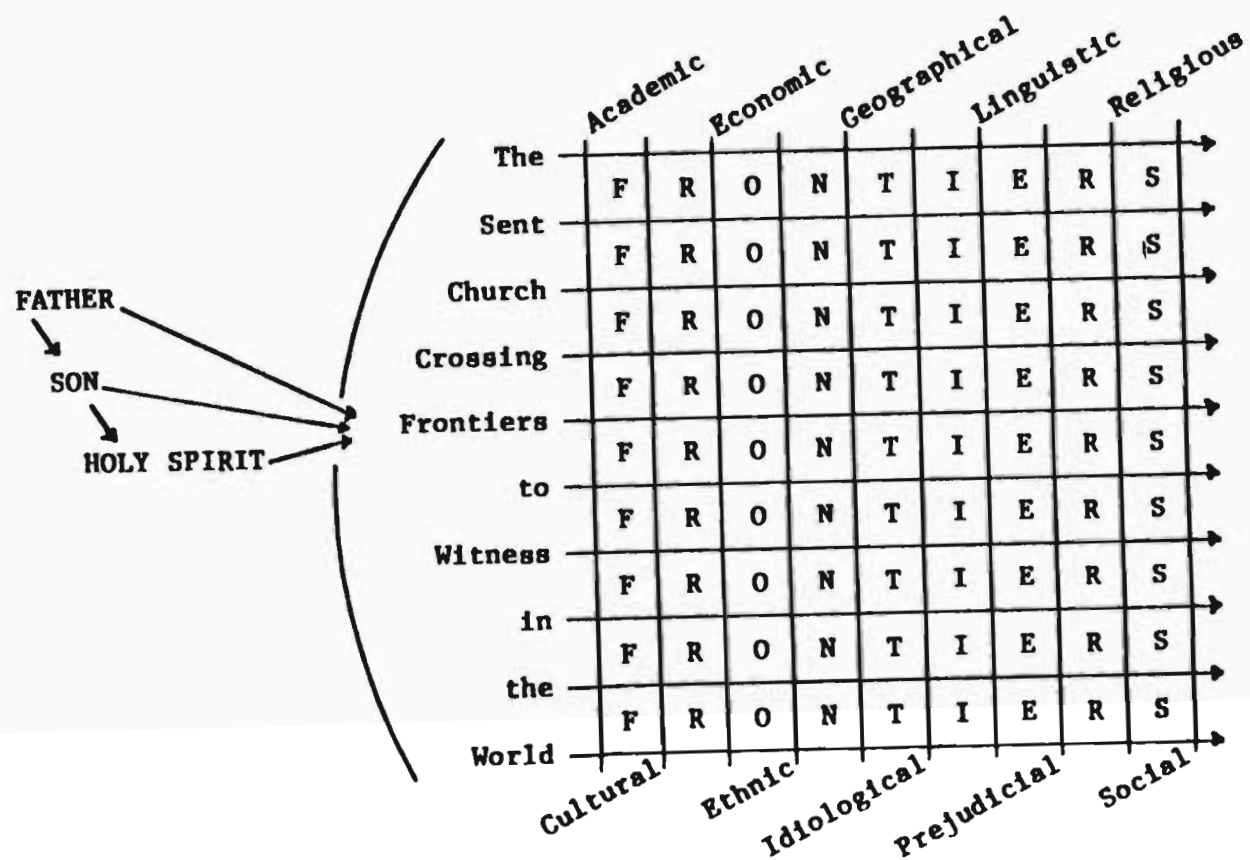


Figure 2
Mission As Crossing Frontiers

The concept of "movement" refers to a group of people, large or small, with new vision and drive, either within, or along side of, or separate from the institution. A movement is generally charismatic, spontaneous, creative, unpredictable, intentional, and eventful.

Another way of looking at institution and movement is to use the ecclesiological typology developed by Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1927). He differentiated between church-type, sect-type, and mystical-type Christianity.¹³ Some theologians reject the term "sect" because of its implied derogation; they prefer the word "church" with a strong sense of approbation. Others use all three concepts simply as typological devices for academic purposes.¹⁴ I will use these ecclesiological types whenever appropriate to the enhancement, not to the exclusion, of other concepts.

The church-type is similar to the institution with its defined creeds, ordained clergy, salvific order of sacraments, principle of universality, and formalized traditions. In contrast, the sect-type is based on the new birth as a religious experience, voluntary membership, priesthood of all believers and lay leadership, enthusiasm for propagating its own faith, reliance on the leading of the Holy Spirit, and radical biblicism. This type is closest to what Robert Kreider calls the "brotherhood-type church,"¹⁵ a designation frequently used in Mennonite circles. The mystical type is neither tied to the institution nor dependent on radical biblicism; it is rather a movement that emerges

¹³ Ernst Troeltsch, The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches, trans. Olive Wyon with an Introduction by H. Richard Niebuhr, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), vol. 1, pp. 231-233; vol. 2, pp. 461-462; 993ff.

¹⁴ David O. Moberg's book, The Church as a Social Institution (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962) is an excellent typological study representing a variety of views. Cf. his interpretation of Troeltsch, p. 74f.

¹⁵ Robert Kreider, "The Anabaptist Conception of the Church in the Russian Environment 1789-1870," Mennonite Quarterly Review 25 (1951), 17-33.

beside the church on the one hand and beside the sect on the other, appearing as an individualistic strand "freely combining Christian ideas with other elements."¹⁶

A third and more theological approach to movement and institution is to view the one in terms of "event character of Christianity" and the other as "theologizing trait of religious man," as Herbert C. Jackson points out. Moving from the early church through the various eras of ecclesiastical history, Jackson seeks to demonstrate that the church has been missionarily active as long as it remained "untheological" in character. But whenever it entered a "period of theological formulation," argues Jackson, it ceased to be involved in mission.¹⁷

This approach identifies the movement closely with the sect-type or brotherhood-type of Christianity. Its focus is on spontaneous community rather than structured organization, on charisma rather than office; it emphasizes event and covenant more than creed and sacrament.

Jackson's thesis is missiologically useful and stimulating. Yet it is historically neither consistent nor accurate, as David Bosch perceptively argues. Theologizing and missionizing are not mutually exclusive, as Jackson would have us believe. The church can become so absorbed in its theological formulations that it loses its missionary zeal and thereby forfeits its event-character. But it cannot missionize without theology; whenever the church missionizes it is also forced to theologize--even if only implicitly so.¹⁸

The dialectical tension between the two must be recognized and will become increasingly evident as I delineate the institutionalization process of the Anabaptist-

¹⁶ Moberg, Social Institution, p. 75.

¹⁷ Bosch, Witness, pp. 23, 23-27. Bosch bases his interpretation largely on an essay by Herbert C. Jackson, "The Missionary Obligation of Theology," Occasional Bulletin from the Missionary Research Library 15 (January 1964), 1; cf. 1-6.

¹⁸ Jackson, "Obligation of Theology," pp. 1-2; cf. Bosch, Witness, pp. 23-27, 95-96.

Mennonite movement on the one hand (Chapters 2 and 4) and the renewal movement of the Mennonite Brethren as a historical event within institutionalized Mennonitism on the other (Chapter 5).

Generation and second generation. The term "generation" is applied to people who share either a common experience or a common heritage which is strong enough to bind them together for the pursuit of self-preservation at a given time in history. Biologically speaking, the age of a generation lasts approximately thirty years. Yet when I speak of the "second generation" I am not referring to biological chronology. Instead, I am referring as Walter Freytag does,¹⁹ to the Christian heritage expressed by the mode of Christian living of a socioreligious group of people within a given epoch. In that sense, second-generation Christians may mean third-, fourth-, or even fifth-generation Christians, that is, those people who have accepted a set of Christian values and beliefs inherent in institutional Christianity.²⁰ Today's Mennonite Brethren have entered the fifth generation and, therefore, have a tradition with many institutionalized traits which overshadow the already weakened focus on event-character.

Nature and Scope

This study is neither purely historical nor primarily a theological treatment of Mennonite Brethren mission. It is rather an investigation into and analysis of historical roots and actual fruits as the combined dynamics always at work in the development of any movement, religious or secular.

Five elements deserve to be underscored. First, the progressive form of the verbal noun thinking in the title of this study assumes that the ideas of the Mennonite

¹⁹ Walter Freytag, "Das Problem der zweiten Generation in der jungen Kirche," in Reden und Aufsätze, eds. Jan Hermelink and Hans Jochen Margull (München: Kaiser, 1961), I, 245-258.

²⁰ Kasdorf, Conversion, p. 143.

Brethren on the matter of mission are not fixed in static thought forms; the process is rather ongoing and dynamic. As time moves on, such a process has the potential for achieving greater depths and heights, lengths and breadths commensurate with the growing task around the globe.

Second, emphasis is also on Mennonite Brethren (MB) as the subject doing the mission thinking. The MB Church has its historical and theological roots within the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. This free church movement emerged simultaneously with the magisterial Lutheran and Reformed wings of the Protestant Reformation during the first half of the sixteenth century in Europe.²¹ The immediate origin, however, lay in the Great Awakening that swept across the Continent in the first half of the nineteenth century. This awakening affected large segments of the Christian Church, including those Mennonites who at that time lived on the steppes of Southern Russia under the Charter of Privileges granted to them by Catherine the Great.²²

Today the Mennonite Brethren are only one small denomination among more than a dozen other constituent Mennonite groups with a total adult membership of about one million, living in some forty countries across the globe. What is called "The Mennonite Brethren Board of Missions/Services" was founded in 1885, though under a different name. But that is only one of nineteen independent Mennonite

²¹ Westin, Der Weg; Durnbaugh, Believers' Church. For complete data see note 1, above.

²² Between 1789 and 1870 about 8,000 Mennonites moved from Prussia to Russia. Frank H. Epp, "The Migrations of the Mennonites," in Mennonite World Handbook, ed. Paul N. Kraybill (Lombard, IL: Mennonite World Conference, 1978), pp. 10-19. For the Charter of Privileges and other historical data see David H. Epp, Die Chortitzer Mennoniten (Odessa: A. Schultze, 1889), pp. 24-32; cf. P. M. Friesen, Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Russland (Halbstadt, Taurien: Verlagsgesellschaft "Raduga," 1911), pp. 73f., 98-100; P. M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), trans. and ed. by J. B. Toews et al. (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), pp. 91, 119-120.

mission boards.²³

Despite some theological and operational differences between the various Mennonite groups, the bonds that hold them together seem to be stronger than the boundaries that keep them apart. Most groups have their own structures for missionary and philanthropic purposes, and their own statements of faith. But all participate in the Mennonite World Conference to demonstrate historical affinity and to declare creedal solidarity,²⁴ and in the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) to carry out a common task of Christian social responsibility to the world "in the name of Christ."²⁵

Third, another ingredient is mission. Traditionally, Mennonite Brethren have not differed significantly from various evangelical groups in their understanding of mission, except in their high view of the Believers' Church.²⁶ The Church is seen as handmaid of the Kingdom and the responsible agent for mission in the world.

As the product of a revival movement within the larger Mennonite community, the Mennonite Brethren have from the very beginning in 1860 sensed a missionary responsibility towards the world. They began their missionary outreach among their own kinfolk, soon expanded it to the Russian peoples, and then extended it to regions beyond. The call

²³ Paul N. Kraybill, ed., Mennonite World Handbook (Lombard, IL: Mennonite World Conference, 1978), pp. 4, 10f., 389-390.

²⁴ Cornelius J. Dyck, "The History of the Mennonite World Conference," in Kraybill, Mennonite World Handbook, pp. 1-9.

²⁵ Peter J. Klassen, "The Anabaptist-Mennonite Witness Through Mutual Aid," in The Church in Mission, ed. A. J. Klassen (Hillsboro, KS: M.B. Publishing House, 1967), pp. 101-114. Every package of food, clothing, or medicine distributed by MCC bears a label with the inscription: "In the Name of Christ."

²⁶ Hans Kasdorf, "The Church Concept of the Mennonite Brethren in Anabaptist Perspective" (Master's thesis, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno, CA, 1972). Of special significance are chapters 5 and 6, pp. 84-149.

to be a missionary people was taken quite seriously. It was obvious to them that the way of discipleship could best be expressed by being God's people, by obeying and proclaiming God's Word, and by doing deeds of compassion in the world.

The early Mennonite Brethren in Russia did not dichotomize between mission work at home and abroad. They thought in wholistic terms and saw themselves as missionary people in the world, perceiving the world to be everywhere, as I will show in Chapter 7. But that way of thinking changed significantly with the second generation and particularly in the American context as will become evident in Chapters 8 and 10. Since Mennonite Brethren mission in Russia was confined to the period of 1860 to 1928, that is from the birth of the MB Church to the implementation of Stalin's new economic policy, its fundamental philosophy on record is basically that of American development. It is therefore not surprising that the Mennonite Brethren enterprise in sending its sons and daughters as missionaries across geographical frontiers has been more substantial and consistent than its witness on home turf. In less than a century the younger Mennonite Brethren Churches in Asia, Africa, and Latin America have numerically outgrown the sending churches of Russia (1889-1914) and North America (1899-present).²⁷

The years of the 1860s and 1870s may be seen as years of self-discovery and consolidation for the Mennonite Brethren. Their initial vision was local and national. But with the migration from Russia to the Americas from 1874 onward, the vision for the world far away and its implication for world mission seems to have moved into sharp focus.²⁸

²⁷ Details will be filled in by statistics from the latest convention of Mennonite Brethren Churches which convened in Reedley, California, October 1984.

²⁸ Cf. J. A. Toews, A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975), ch. 2: "Consolidation and Expansion," pp. 69-85.

This expanded vision was accompanied by a proliferation of mission thinking. Such concepts as Äussere Mission (foreign mission) and innere Mission (home mission), Stadtmission (city mission), and Judenmission (Jewish mission or mission to the Jews) were already in vogue in Protestant circles when the Mennonite Brethren became involved in mission work.²⁹ Not only did the Mennonite Brethren adopt both concepts and practice; in Canada they even added other models, namely Randmission or mission on the fringes and Kindermision or mission to children.³⁰

The common denominator in all these missions was a sense of sentness with a strong evangelistic thrust outside the MB community. Therefore, mission was defined more in terms of geographical distance and ethnical distinctions than in terms of spiritual and social needs of all people. Itinerant evangelism was carried on among Mennonites; mission work was carried on among a variety of other ethnic peoples.³¹ When Mennonites converted they were received into Mennonite Brethren congregations; peoples of non-Mennonite background were not easily integrated.

Fourth, the parameters of MB mission thinking are here defined by one century: between 1885 and 1984. The reason for such limited scope is historically determined by the emergence of a Mission Board, which became the denominational vehicle for translating the missionary dimension into the missionary intention.

²⁹ Gustav Warneck attempted to clarify the meaning of mission and to differentiate between the various concepts of home and foreign mission, etc. But he was only moderately successful. Evangelische Missionslehre: Ein missions-theoretischer Versuch, 2nd ed., 3 vols. in 5 parts (Gotha: Friedrich Andreas Perthes, 1897-1905), I, 1-7; III, part 1, 1-85.

³⁰ Peter Penner, Reaching the Otherwise Unreached (Clearbrook, B.C.: West Coast Children's Mission, 1959), pp. 15-17.

³¹ For a historical description of rise and development of these various MB mission efforts see A. H. Unruh, Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde 1860-1954 (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, 1955), pp. 634-731. Cf. Chapter 10 below.

Mennonite Brethren mission thinking did neither evolve nor develop in a vacuum. Numerous historical forces and theological factors have made their formative contributions. Therefore, the thesis implies progression and continuity and must be seen in historical perspective.

In the normal process of history, mission action has shaped mission thinking as much as mission thinking has produced fruits through action. Here, too, is a dialectical tension. One hundred years of mission thinking did not appear on the historical arena without precedent and background. There were signs along the way of both dimension and intention. Therefore, its roots must be missiologically analyzed. Not only were the Mennonite Brethren born at midpoint of the so-called "Great Century of Mission,"³² they also had a rich missionary heritage rooted in the Anabaptist Mennonite tradition, later renewed through the influences of Pietism and the German Baptists. The germination and growth of MB mission thinking must be seen against this wider canvas of history and within the context of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of Protestant mission philosophy. The recovery of the Anabaptist-Mennonite mission dynamics, for example, and the encounter of the early brethren with various mission movements provided inspiration and motivation to develop their own thinking and activity.³³

Such historical perspective, however, cannot be treated without critical reflection. After more than 120 years, the

³² As early as 1880, Gustav Warneck wrote a book entitled, Warum ist das 19. Jahrhundert ein Missionsjahrhundert? (Halle: Julius Fricke, 1880). This concept seems to have been picked up more recently by the late Kenneth Scott Latourette and popularized in anglophone circles through his idea of the "Great Century of Expansion," covering the years 1800-1914. Cf. his A History of the Expansion of Christianity, 7 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan CEP Edition, 1970), vols. IV-VI.

³³ As I will show in Chapter 5, definite historical forces influenced the early Mennonite Brethren to become involved in mission. Some of these forces had their roots in eighteenth-century Pietism, impacting the Mennonites in Holland, Prussia, and eventually also in Russia.

fifth generation of Mennonite Brethren is now aggressively assuming its leadership role on the historical platform of the denomination. With it is also emerging a new crop of missionaries whose mission thinking is shaped as much--if not more--by the contemporary world situation of modernity as by historical influences and tradition. Ours is the first generation Mennonite Brethren to participate fully in the conditions of a predominantly urbanized social structure. We are a generation molded within the cultural context of secularized modernity and theological pluralism of the global city on planet earth. What will give content to its mission thinking and form to its mission structures? Or will this generation exchange maintenance for mission as did their fifth generation Anabaptist forefathers centuries before them? Such and similar questions demand critical responses and will be addressed in this study, particularly in the concluding section.

Thesis and Objectives

The Mennonite Brethren have never spelled out a systematic theology basic to their faith, let alone an explicit theology fundamental to their missional involvement. Whatever theology there is exists more by implication than by expression. Thus they have been more interested in applying than in formulating essential biblical principles underlying the missionary nature and action of the Believers' Church in the world. They have operated more on given assumptions than on formal pronouncements. They have repeatedly made policy statements and operational principles, but without dogmatic formulations. Such statements do speak of deep convictions regarding a sense of missionary calling and ongoing responsibility to the world. With that in mind I want to state the thesis of this study in the following way.

First, Mennonite Brethren mission thinking has its theological and philosophical roots in three major traditions: (a) the Judeo-Christian teachings of Jesus and the apostles as recorded in both the Old and New Testaments; (b) the historical Anabaptist-Mennonite heritage of the sixteenth-

century Reformation in Europe; and (c) the great historical renewal movements, especially those of Pietism and the German Baptists. These are the ecclesiotheological antecedents of Mennonite Brethren understanding of mission.

Second, the original Anabaptist-Mennonite missionary vision and activity were gradually--but ironically--lost in rigorous efforts to maintain a unique church view in new cultural contexts. In the struggle of maintaining for themselves what they possessed, the Mennonites lost what they had to give to the world.

Third, the early Mennonite Brethren clearly saw themselves standing in the historical tradition of the Anabaptist-Mennonite vision of the missionary church, particularly that of the Dutch contingent. They endeavoured to restore that vision by intentionally crossing frontiers to the world rather than by maintaining isolation from the world. The missionary spirit of the Anabaptist-Mennonites had gone through generational tides of the ebb and flow of history. While the rising flow of the first generations had reached its dynamic momentum quite early in history, subsequent generational cycles experienced the lowest ebb in the middle of the nineteenth century in Russia. But revival and renewal brought new life with a vision for mission.

To what extent has the original vision of the founding fathers in 1860, which was structurally implemented in 1885, been a factor for continued world mission involvement of subsequent generations? The question is one of inner motivation, biblical focus, sociocultural forces, and theological orientation of the Mennonite Brethren in their relation to other Mennonite groups as well as within the context of the larger oikoumene of various Protestant camps. The present study is concerned with a theme that has surfaced at various times and places, but which has never been subjected to serious historical and missiological investigation. Therefore, my purpose here is to research and to assess critically the resources available in order to discover what theological, historical, sociocultural, spiritual, strategical, and methodological factors have shaped the mission thinking

and action of the Mennonite Brethren since the latter part of the nineteenth century. My study, however, must either assume familiarity with Anabaptist-Mennonite history and mission involvement prior to 1860, or it must investigate the movement's contributions as the historical framework of this project. Since no serious mission study has ever been undertaken in which present Mennonite Brethren mission thinking is seen in light of the Anabaptist-Mennonite mission ebb and flow, I feel compelled to follow the latter course of action. Such an approach requires a more extensive historical background than might otherwise have been necessary. Therefore, Chapters 2 and 3 have been included to provide this background.

Methodology and Resources

In keeping with the commitment to my calling of being a missionary to missionaries, I have chosen to use the discipline of missiology as a tool of investigation throughout the process of this study. In order to allow the voices of history and theology to speak with clarity I have deemed it prudent to provide historical and contextual data against which MB mission thinking can be most adequately understood and interpreted.

I have made use of two basic types of source materials. As much as possible I have used primary sources. These include Anabaptist writings, major Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren periodicals and yearbooks, and other available publications in German, English, and Russian. The Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies of the Historical Library and Archives of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches which is housed in the Hiebert Library in Fresno holds an impressive collection of books, pamphlets, manuscripts, handbooks, sermons, letters, case studies, personal journals, Mission Board policies, recommendations, resolutions, reports, and many other readily accessible documents. Materials used have been carefully selected on the basis of their qualitative value and relevancy to this study.

Secondary sources have frequently been consulted in order to enhance my own understanding and to elucidate trends in contemporary mission theology. They have also been helpful to set Mennonite Brethren mission thinking against an historical background and into the context of the larger missiological scene.

- Style and Structure

Style and structure of this study have largely been determined by the type of resources used and the content developed. In principle, the best research practices have been consistently adhered to in quoting and documenting the sources.

The structure of this study is thematic rather than chronological. Part one describes the adventure by laying out the parameters. Part two deals with the legacy of theological and historical roots against which Mennonite Brethren mission thinking is to be examined. Anabaptism and Pietism are here perceived as striking harmonious chords of affinity within early Mennonite Brethrenism in Russia. The resonance of this young movement to the dual heritage has been so forceful that one of its present-day scholars has referred to the Brethren as a church "born of Anabaptism and Pietism."³⁴ There is, in fact, ample evidence of cross-fertilization between the Anabaptists and the Pietists in Europe, even prior to the birth of the Mennonite Brethren.

The third part is seen as an experience in Russia. Here the Mennonite Brethren actually experienced both their birth as a church and their birth as a missionary people. Here they learned to walk the missionary road under the most difficult circumstances. There were barriers and blockades,

³⁴ Victor Adrian, General Secretary of the Board of Missions and Services, has entitled his essay on the Mennonite Brethren Church, Born of Anabaptism and Pietism (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1965). Special insert in the Mennonite Brethren Herald, March 26, 1965. Cf. A. J. Klassen, "The Roots and Development of Mennonite Brethren Theology to 1914" (master's thesis, Wheaton College Graduate School, Wheaton, IL, 1966).

tests and trials. Some of these lay within the nature of the movement, others were imposed from the outside. The Brethren were able to remove some, whereas others proved destructive to their missionary cause.

In part four I seek to analyze actual shape and thought of MB mission as it emerged and developed in America. This as well as the former section deals with both the missionary dimension and the missionary intention. The influence of leading personalities, the makers of policies, decisions reached by Conference action, and guidelines spelled out in official documents of the denomination help to identify distinct mission philosophies, theologies, and structures at given periods between 1885 and 1984.

Finally, part five is a reflection. I take a critical look at my own accomplishments and point out issues which I have not included in this study. They are suggested as a challenge to the present generation who will give leadership and direction to Mennonite Brethren mission thinking and action at the dawn of millennium three.

Need and Validity of the Present Study

I have deep convictions regarding the validity of this study. First, it is long overdue. With few exceptions, the Mennonite Brethren have not been assertive on the literary production line during the first century of their history. The first three generations had to nurture themselves on a borrowed and imported rather than home-baked literary diet. This is especially true in the area of mission studies prior to 1960.³⁵ Even after 1960 only five notable mission books have appeared in print: (a) a Festschrift,³⁶ in honor of

³⁵ The only noteworthy studies prior to 1960 are: (a) G. W. Peters, The Growth of Foreign Missions in the Mennonite Brethren Church, 1947; (b) John H. Lohrenz, The Mennonite Brethren Church, 1949, of which Part 3 (pp. 229-282) deals with mission history; and (c) Mrs. H. T. Esau, First Sixty Years of Mennonite Brethren Missions, 1954. See bibliography for complete data.

³⁶ J. A. Klassen, ed., The Church in Mission, a Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to J. B. Toews (Hillsboro, KS: M.B. Publishing House, 1967).

professor emeritus J. B. Toews treating a broad spectrum of topics; (b) a more popular volume by Phyllis Martens designed for mission study groups in local churches;³⁷ (c) a case study of Mennonite Brethren mission in Latin America, by J. J. Toews;³⁸ (d) a similar study of the Mennonite Brethren work in Zaire, by J. B. Toews;³⁹ and (e) an introductory volume of Mennonite Brethren mission foundations by G. W. Peters.⁴⁰ Beyond that all mission literature of the Mennonite Brethren lies shielded in raw form on shelves and shelters within archival vaults and walls.

Second, this study is unique in character and content. With the exception of the regional African and the somewhat broader Latin American case studies just mentioned, all earlier books are historical surveys rather than critical reflections. This has left the underlying theology and philosophy as the dynamic, motivating forces in MB mission virtually untouched. Much like their Anabaptist forebears, the Mennonite Brethren have had no explicit mission theology; yet they have not lacked an implicit theological focus in mission based on profound biblical and historical insights. Therein lie the basic threads of the warp and the weft woven into the fabric of a century of MB mission thinking.

Third, the study is devoted to address a worthy and decisive generation--the fifth generation Mennonite Brethren now coming into leadership. The future of mission will be shaped by their thought and action. The words of Goethe's

³⁷ Phyllis Martens, The Mustard Tree: The Story of Mennonite Brethren Missions (Fresno: Mennonite Brethren Board of Christian Education in cooperation with the Board of Missions/Services, 1971).

³⁸ J. J. Toews, The Mennonite Brethren Mission in Latin America (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1975).

³⁹ J. B. Toews, The Mennonite Brethren Church in Zaire (Hillsboro, KS: M.B. Publishing House, 1978); A. K. Wiens and Gertrude Wiens, Shadowed by the Great Wall (Hillsboro, KS: M.B. Publishing House, 1979). This last book is actually a record of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Mission in Mongolia, later adopted by the Mennonite Brethren.

⁴⁰ G. W. Peters, Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions (Hillsboro, KS: Kindred Press, 1984).

Faust in one of his contemplative soliloquies are apropos to this generation:

Whatever you inherit from another age,
By toil and sweat can be your heritage.⁴¹

Each generation is responsible to assess in a new way the values of its spiritual and cultural heritage, lest they be reduced to a mere archival collection somewhere hidden away in fireproof vaults. As a missiologist with a love for the church I was forced to discover the value of my fathers' mission thinking--but not only for myself. I am under the constraint of generational indebtedness. Therefore, I consider the present generation worthy of coming into full ownership--even if "by toil and sweat"--of that rich heritage. But the eventual acquisition of such a treasure is not an end in itself; it is only a means toward an end.

As did the forefathers, so does the present generation Mennonite Brethren have a redemptive message to proclaim to a redeem-worthy world. The method of proclamation is by being the people of God, by telling the good news of the kingdom, and by doing deeds of compassion. Our forefathers interpreted this to mean being missionary witnesses of Christ as Savior and Lord to reconcile and transform a needy world. Times and conditions have changed, but the message of the gospel of reconciliation and transformation remains the same.

Unless the Mennonite Brethren sharpen that vision for each generation, they are in danger of losing their greatest gift from God for the world--their very raison d'etre.

⁴¹ Richard Friedenthal, ed., Goethes Werke (München-Zürich: Th. Knaur Nachfolger, 1957), I, 738.

PART TWO

A Legacy:

Historical and Ecclesiological Foundations

Chapter 2

STEPCHILDREN OF THE REFORMATION

Introduction

For the purpose of this study I have chosen such designations as Mainstream Reformers, Mainline Reformers, or Magisterial Reformation to identify the Lutheran as well as the Reformed components of the Protestant Reformation in Europe. For the larger dissenting counterpart commonly referred to as Anabaptists, I have decided to use interchangeably such inclusive metaphors as Stepchildren, Left Wing Reformation, Radical Reformation, and other such terms as seem most appropriate within a given context.

The objective of this chapter is to give a brief background for the Anabaptist mission as well as to identify the ecclesiastically more exclusive Anabaptist-Mennonite movement as a historical, theological, ethnical, and cultural antecedent of the Mennonite Brethren first in Russia and later in America. In doing so I shall (a) describe the ecclesiastical context, (b) list early Anabaptist genres, (c) identify the Evangelicals as the forefathers of the Mennonites, and (d) delineate the marks of the Evangelicals who have historically played a major role in shaping a mission mentality for Mennonites throughout the world.

Broad Ecclesiastical Context

The Roman Catholic Church had come to a crossroad in the long trek of its institutional history. While its faithful potentates of Portugal and Spain launched a mighty course of expansionism to the Orient, the Americas, and the African continent, some of its own sons and daughters planted a seedbed of suspicion regarding economic exploitation and ethical practices at the doorsteps of Rome. The ninety-five theses posted by Martin Luther (1483-1546) on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg in 1517, his translation of the

Bible into the language of the German people in the 1520s, and the publication of the Sixty-Seven Articles by Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) of Zürich in 1522 were like mighty explosions that shook the very foundation of every existing institution, both ecclesiastical and secular in Germany and Switzerland. The shockwaves released an enormous avalanche that neither religious nor secular decrees were able to stop.

Protesting Sons of the Church

The womb of the early sixteenth-century church, being severely distressed by the dynamics of history, was constrained to abort what Leonard Verduin has called "The Reformers and Their Stepchildren."¹ These were the protesters against the ecclesiastical status quo and the dissenters from the Catholic Church and its imperial allies. Some of the protesting and dissenting sons were more radical than others in their approach to reformation and restoration (Figure 3).

The Mainline Reformers operated on the principle of reformatio of the existing Constantinian-Theodosian ecclesiastical system. With Luther in the lead, assisted by such faithful disciples as Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560), the Protestant Reformation established deep roots on German soil. The Reformed counterpart emerged under the leadership of Zwingli in Zürich, was carried on by Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575), was given theological shape and form by Jean Calvin (1509-1564) in Geneva, and was finally brought to Scotland by his disciple John Knox (1514-1572). Within a period of two decades the new teaching of sola Scriptura, sola fide, and sola gratia had covered the entire continent. Before long the various endeavors of the Mainline Reformers were known as Lutheranism in Germany and Scandinavia, Zwinglianism in the German Cantons, Calvinism in the French territories of Switzerland, and Presbyterianism in Scotland. Calvinism also took deep roots in the Netherlands, giving rise to the Reformed

¹ Leonard Verduin, The Reformers and Their Stepchildren (1964; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980).

Church there. Our study must assume sufficient familiarity with these major Reformation currents and regard any further description beyond these preliminary observations as superfluous.

Dissenting Stepchildren

This stream is generally called Wiedertäufer or Anabaptists, which literally means "rebaptizers." The Mennonite Brethren, like all other Mennonite groups, find their historical and theological affinity more with the Stepchildren of the Reformation than with the Reformers themselves. Yet without the true fathers of the Reformation, the Stepchildren could not have emerged.

Ecclesiastical restitution. The Stepchildren formed a more radical stream than the Reformers, especially in their view of the church. While the aspiration of the Mainline Reformers was reformatio of the corpus Christianum, the Anabaptists operated on the principle of restitutio of the corpus Christi as seen in the congregation of believers in apostolic times. Philip Schaff (1819-1893) has put it this way: "The Reformers aimed to reform the old Church by the Bible, the Radicals attempted to build the new Church from the Bible." Whereas the Reformers founded a popular state-church, coercively including all citizens with their families, Schaff contends, "the Anabaptists organized on the voluntary principle select congregations of baptized believers, separated from the world and from the state."² Their insights on these matters derived from the Reformers' axiomatic principle of sola Scriptura as the Scriptures were read, heard, and interpreted by the congregation, and not by the civil authorities or by visionary individualists.

Many of the smaller reformatory tributaries eventually flowed into one stream, distinct from that of the Mainstream

² Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, vol. 8: The Swiss Reformation, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 71.

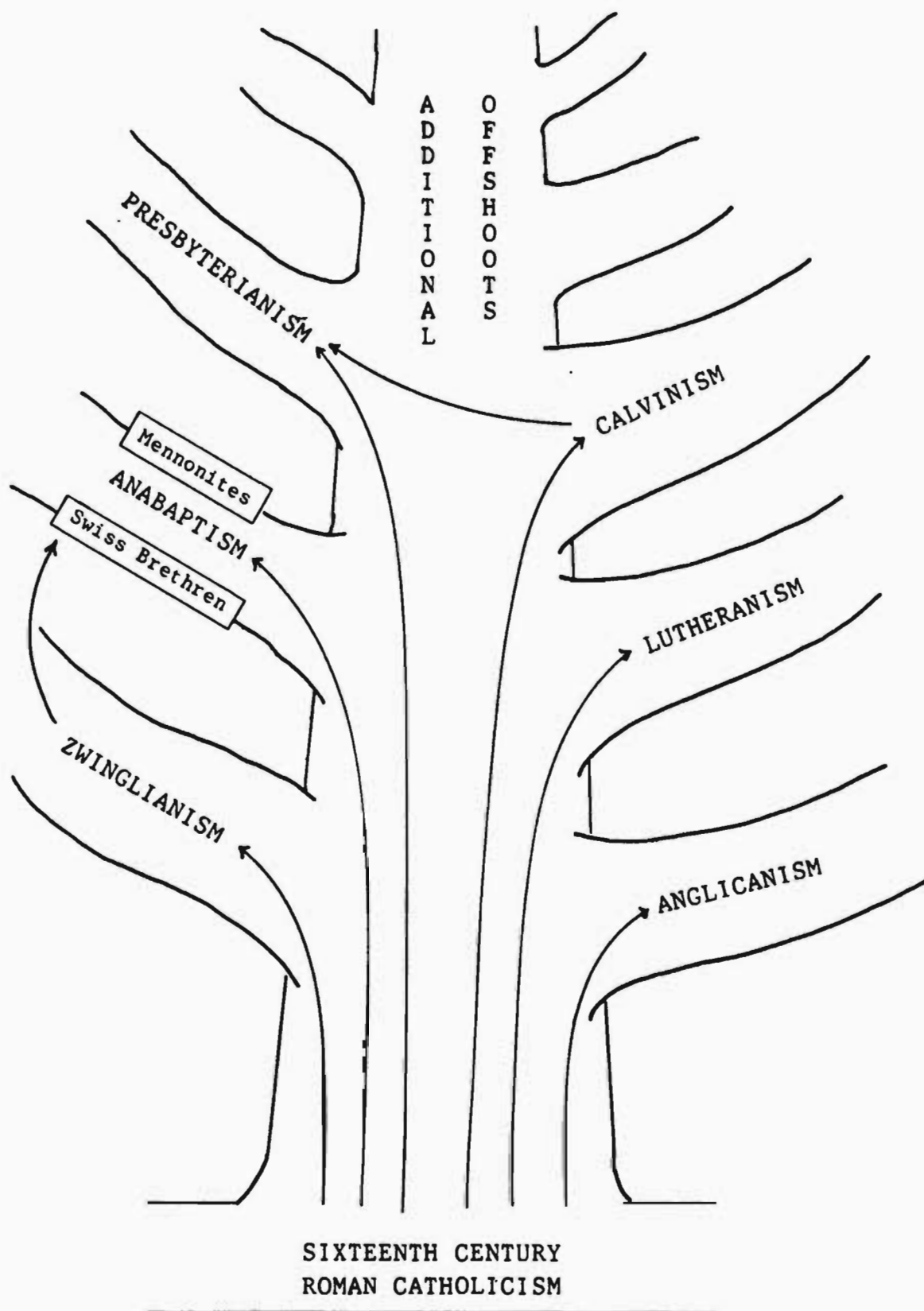


Figure 3

The Protestant Reformation

Source: Merle Severy and James L. Amos, "The World of Luther," National Geographic 164 (October 1983), 424.

Reformers. But its banks could not contain this volatile content. When Luther published his three major Reformation treatises in which he had clarified his own theological position in 1520,³ an uncontrollable tidal wave of diverse sectarian-type ideas and convictions was already flooding the whole land. As it gained momentum and formed a separate movement alongside the larger Protestant reformation, it began to spill over into all walks of life, adding ferment upon ferment to the already fomenting European continent. In its wake it embraced humble peasants and artisans, proud princes and aristocrats, devout women and sophisticated youths, desperate politicians and disillusioned humanists. It was as much a socioreligious phenomenon as the Reformation itself and no less dynamic than the Counter Reformation a few decades later.⁴

Typological identification. Many terms have been coined and phrases formulated to identify the Anabaptist Movement more precisely and to distinguish it more clearly from the Mainstream Reformation. Here Troeltsch's ecclesiological conceptualization comes to our aid. His concept of the sect-type fits the dynamic event-character of the Anabaptists, in contrast to the church-type which corresponds to the theologizing trait of the Reformation. The one is a movement, the other more like an institution. Although the two types are not altogether unrelated, they are quite different in character, structure, function, and aspiration. While the church-type is universal, accepts the secular order as normative, weaves the ruling classes into its own fabric, and

³ Luther's three Reformation tracts appeared between August 18 and early November of 1520 in this order: (1) "To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation" (LW 44:115-118); (2) "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church" (LW 36:3-126); and (3) "The Freedom of a Christian" (LW 31:327-378). Luther's Works, American Edition, 55 vols., Helmut T. Lehmann, general ed. for vols. 31-55 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957-1966).

⁴ George H. Williams, The Radical Reformation, 3rd printing (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), p. 846.

aspires to dominate the masses, the sect-type is small, rejects the civil and secular powers of the world, attracts more the lower than the upper classes, establishes close-knit fellowships among its members, and seeks after inward spirituality, perfection, and religious character. It is more often than not intolerant of the institution.⁶

Troeltsch includes both the Catholics and Protestants in the institutional church-type. His thesis is based on the dynamics of socioreligious history, allowing much room for interaction and mobility within as well as between the various groups. This is made possible by what he calls the Lex Naturae or Natural Law.⁷ This means that the germ of the sect-type can be latent in any church-type, and that the seed of the church-type may find fertile soil for growth in any sect-type.⁸ Thus when the given moment of history is ripe, as it was in the early part of the sixteenth century, the Natural Law, according to Troeltsch, takes effect, the germ sprouts, and the church-type of Christianity gives birth to the sect-type. In other words, the institution gives birth to a movement. But again, the sect-type can lose its radical spirit and event character, and by the same Natural Law gradually develop into the institutional church-type.⁹ Such sect-cycle is, in fact, not uncommon in the generational processes in church history.¹⁰

⁵ Ernst Troeltsch, The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches, trans. Olive Wyon with an Introduction by H. Richard Niebuhr, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), vol. 1, pp. 231-233; vol. 2, pp. 461, 993ff.

⁶ Troeltsch, Social Teachings, vol. 1, pp. 231-232; vol. 2, p. 462. See also Herbert C. Jackson, "The Missionary Obligation of Theology," Occasional Bulletin from the Missionary Research Library 15 (January 1964), 1-6; David J. Bosch, Witness to the World (Atlanta: Knox, 1980), pp. 23-27.

⁷ Troeltsch, Social Teachings, vol. 1, pp. 158f., 259f., 328-343.

⁸ Troeltsch, Social Teachings, vol. 2, p. 702.

⁹ Troeltsch, Social Teachings, vol. 2, pp. 703-704.

¹⁰ Calvin Redekop, "The Sect Cycle in Perspective," Mennonite Quarterly Review 36 (1962), 155.

During the Reformation period the various Anabaptist groups were sufficiently different from the Mainline Protestants and cohesive among themselves that Troeltsch classifies all of them as the sect-type belonging to one mixed, dissenting family of ecclesiastical Stepchildren. Subsequent generations, even though divided and dispersed, maintained a sense of bonding that the term brotherhood-type or koinonia-type could also describe the nature of the movement.¹¹

Historiographical designations. Modern historians have moved in another direction. Roland Bainton, for example, has called the Anabaptists "the Left Wing of the Reformation" as opposed to the right wing of the Mainstream Reformers.¹² Heinold Fast follows Bainton in Der linke Flügel der Reformation,¹³ whereas George H. Williams prefers to label them, "the Radical Reformation."¹⁴ Still others have identified them as a distinctly "third type"¹⁵ that was neither like medieval Catholicism nor like magisterial Protestantism,¹⁶ but a free and voluntary church movement.¹⁷

¹¹ Robert Kreider, "The Anabaptist Conception of the Church in the Russian Mennonite Environment 1789-1870," Mennonite Quarterly Review 25 (1951), 17-33.

¹² Roland H. Bainton, Studies on the Reformation (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963), pp. 122-126.

¹³ Heinold Fast, ed., Der linke Flügel der Reformation: Glaubenszeugnisse der Täufer, Spiritualisten, Schwärmer und Antitrinitarier (Bremen: Schünemann, 1962).

¹⁴ Williams has entitled his monumental work, The Radical Reformation. See footnote 4 of this chapter.

¹⁵ Franklin H. Littell, The Anabaptist View of the Church: A Study of the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism (Boston: Starr King Press, 1958), pp. 1 and 79.

¹⁶ Walter Klaassen, Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant (Waterloo, ON: Conrad Press, 1973).

¹⁷ Gunnar Westin, The Free Church Through the Ages, trans. from the Swedish by Virgil A. Olson (Nashville: Broadman, 1958), pp. 39-155; Franklin H. Littell, The Free Church (Boston: Starr King Press, 1957), pp. 15-42.

That means, notes Gunnar Westin, that the emphasis was on "voluntary fellowship patterned after the practice of the early church, the demand for holy living, and the absolute authority of the Bible."¹⁸ Franklin H. Littell speaks of "classical Free Churchmanship" with its "primitive form and style of the early church." Such Free Church cannot be territorially defined, or culturally conditioned, or politically controlled. "With its ethical concern, its emphasis on the normative significance of primitive Christian patterns of community life the Restitution was as distinct from the plans of the Reformers as it was from the section of Christendom which remained obedient to the Bishop of Rome." Therefore, says Littell, today's best model of yesterday's type is embodied by the living Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition.¹⁹

Complex diversification. Enormous diversities in theology and practice have stretched all parameters of the broader Anabaptist Movement. It is therefore advisable to look at the Stepchildren as siblings of a large family with diverse visions and aspirations. As individual siblings became heads of families, so each group developed its own mood, temperament, life style and theology (Figure 4).

Historians have distinguished between various family groupings. Fritz Blanke divides the Stepchildren into three categories, labeling them Anabaptists, Spiritualists, and Antitrinitarians. He goes on to suggest a fourfold division of the Anabaptists, namely the Swiss Brethren in Switzerland, the Hutterian Brethren in Moravia, the Melchiorites in Germany, and the Mennonites in Holland.²⁰ Fast and Williams essentially concur with Blanke, except that they see in the Melchiorites, followers of Melchior Hofmann (1495-1543),²¹

¹⁸ Westin, The Free Church, p. 40.

¹⁹ Littell, The Free Church, pp. 1-2.

²⁰ Fritz Blanke, Aus der Welt der Reformation (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1960), p. 72.

²¹ Peter Kawerau, Melchior Hofmann als religiöser Denker (Haarlem: De Erven F. Bohn, 1954).

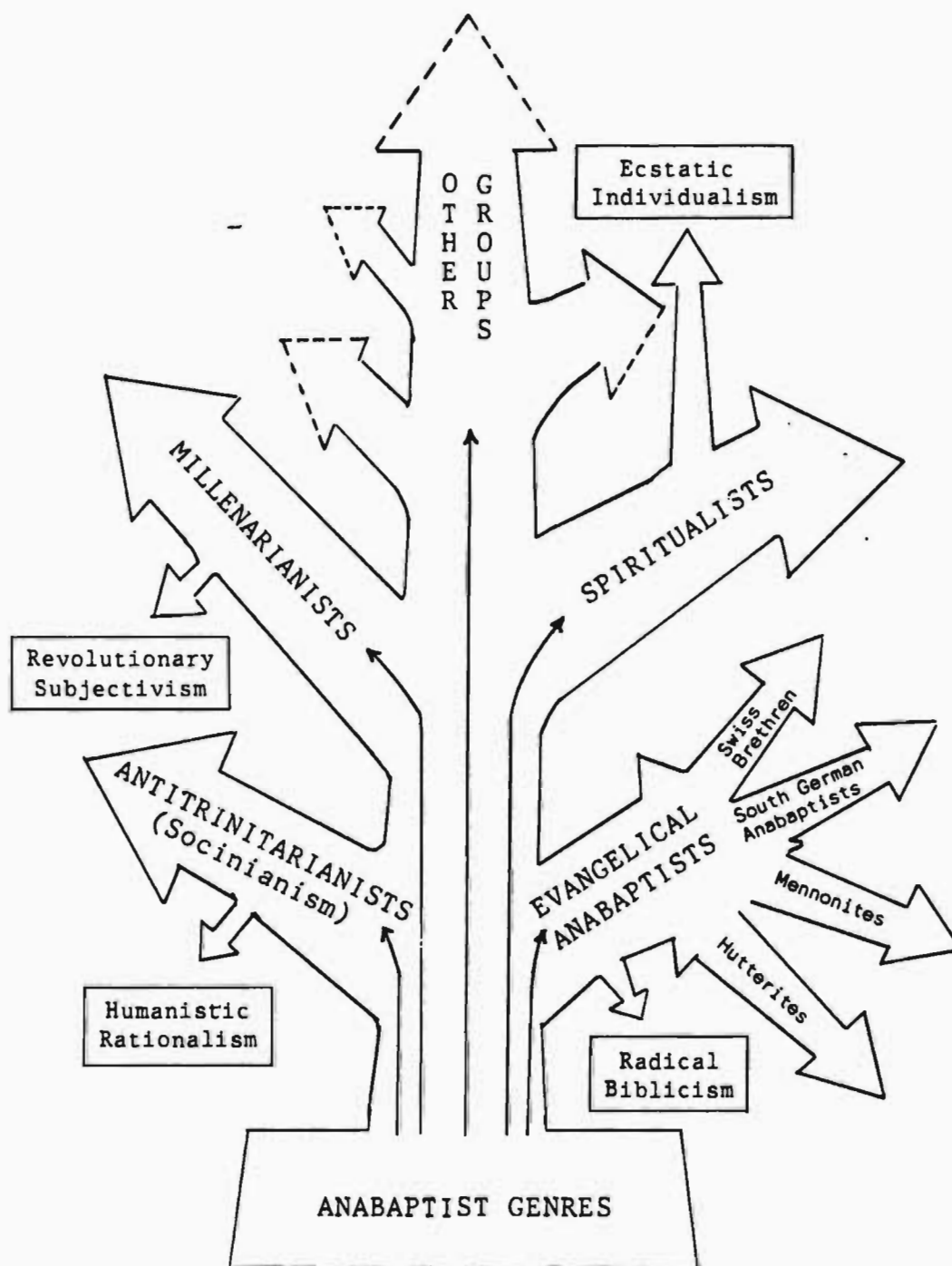


Figure 4
Stepchildren of the
Reformation

a separate group within the broader Left Wing Reformation and not a subgroup of the narrower stream of Anabaptists.²²

But even such detailed classification fails to do justice to the complexity of the movement. Claus-Peter Clasen points out that there were at least twenty different Anabaptist groups which can be identified in Switzerland, Austria, Moravia, and Southern and Central Germany alone. Of these only six played a major role within the movement.²³ Clasen adds to the Swiss and Hutterian Brethren four other groups. The first consisted of the Hutians, so named after Hans Hut (c1490-1527), the apostle of Upper Austria.²⁴ Through the dynamic eschatological and missionary preaching of Hut's "Gospel of All Creatures" (Mk. 16:16), the movement advanced within two years through Franconia, Bavaria, Austria, Tirol, and into Swabia.

Another group consisted of the Pilgramites owing their origin to Pilgram Marpeck (+1556), the learned preacher of faith and love.²⁵ Like their founder, Marpeck's followers became known far and wide as evangelistic apostles wandering throughout Southern Europe.

The Thuringian Anabaptists constituted a third group. Ironically, they had been shaped by the teachings of the

²² Fast, Der linke Flügel, pp. 1, 196, 251, 363; Williams, The Radical Reformation, pp. 846-865.

²³ Claus-Peter Clasen, Anabaptism: A Social History, 1525-1618 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974), pp. 32-36.

²⁴ J. Loserth, "Hut, Hans," Mennonitisches Lexikon, vols. 1-3 ed. by Christian Hege and Christian Neff (Frankfurt a.M. und Weierhof, 1913, 1936, 1938); vol. 4 ed. by Harold S. Bender et al. (Karlsruhe: Heinrich Schneider, 1959), vol. 2, pp. 370-375.

²⁵ John C. Wenger, "The Life and Work of Pilgram Marpeck," Mennonite Quarterly Review 12 (1938), 137-166; John C. Wenger, "Pilgram Marpeck: Tyrolean Engineer and Anabaptist Elder," Church History 9 (1940), 24-36; Jan J. Kiwiet, Pilgram Marpeck (Kassel: Oncken, 1957).

revolutionary Thomas Müntzer (1488-1525)²⁶ who himself never joined the Anabaptists, refusing to be rebaptized and to accept a peace position. Unlike their teacher, the Thuringians adopted believers' baptism; but like him they were not free from militant and communistic tendencies which they freely expressed in sociopolitical activism in Eisenach, Erfurt, Mühlhausen, and the Harz Mountains.²⁷

Finally, Clasen lists the Schnabelians of Hesse. These formed their community around Georg Schnabel, a man strongly influenced by the apocalyptic preaching of Melchior Hofmann. In 1538, however, this group recanted and was (coercively) reconverted to Lutheranism.²⁸

Such diversities on the one hand and the disparity between the ideal and the real on the other has led scholarship of the last decade to be much more critical of the broader Anabaptist movement than earlier scholars have been. Some of these younger students point out that the Anabaptists did not even have a single origin, let alone a unified theology regarding such central issues as the Scriptures, ecclesiology, and discipleship. Thus they favor an approach based on the assumption of a polygenesis theory over against the earlier scholars' claim of a monogenesis for the Anabaptist movement.²⁹

²⁶ Abraham Friesen and Hans-Jürgen Goertz, eds., Thomas Müntzer (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1978); Paul Wappler, Thomas Müntzer in Zwickau und die "Zwickau Propheten" (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1966); Thomas Müntzer, Schriften und kritische Gesamtausgabe, eds. Günther Fauz and Paul Kirn, Briefe (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1968).

²⁷ Clasen, Anabaptism, p. 35.

²⁸ Wilhelm Wiswedel, "Schnabel, Georg," Mennonite Encyclopedia, ed. Harold S. Bender et al., vol. 4 (Scottdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1955-1959), p. 469.

²⁹ An entire issue of the Mennonite Quarterly Review 53 (July 1979) was given to the current debate in Anabaptist-Mennonite Historiography based on an essay by professor Hans-Jürgen Goertz of Hamburg, entitled "History and Theology: A Major Problem of Anabaptist Research Today," pp. 177-188. In addition to an introduction on the "Problems of Anabaptist

This new thesis in Anabaptist-Mennonite historiography makes sixteenth-century Anabaptism look like an exceedingly complex phenomenon. And indeed it was, for "the Anabaptists were divided into a bewildering mass of groups that seemed to disagree with one another entirely."³⁰ But since Anabaptist complexity is not the concern of this study I can leave the disentanglement of that particular problem to historians, theologians, and social scientists. The complexity of the movement is noted here simply to register my awareness of the same and to point out its significance as an historical antecedent of later divisions in Mennonitism.

The Anabaptists provided a theological and, to a lesser degree, a sociocultural legacy for the Mennonites in Western Europe, Prussia, and Russia. Here the Mennonite Brethren Church emerged with its own set of problems imbedded in a cradle that was spiritually akin to, yet socioculturally radically different from, that of its Anabaptist forebears.

Genres of Anabaptists

Littell contends that the Stepchildren are identifiable. They have had their predecessors in history and may again have their progenitors in the twentieth century.³¹ Both their writings and socioreligious activities reflect certain genres by which they can be identified (Figure 4, p. 35).

The Genre of Schwärmer

The fact that this group, though not the oldest, has preoccupied church historians more than any other of the

History" by editor John S. Oyer (pp. 175-176), the exchange was enhanced in a symposium in which six American and European scholars presented critical responses to Goertz's essay (pp. 189-218). Some of the more comprehensive studies of this later research are James M. Stayer, Anabaptists and the Sword (Lawrence, KS: Conrad Press, 1972); Clasen, Anabaptism; Kenneth Ronald Davis, Anabaptism and Asceticism: A Study in Intellectual Origins (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1972).

³⁰ Clasen, Anabaptism, p. 30.

³¹ Littell, The Free Church, pp. 25-42.

Stepchildren has frequently led to a distorted image of Anabaptism. The majority of the Anabaptists were peaceful people who would rather suffer violence than create unrest. In this regard they were much like the Waldensians in earlier centuries. "But alongside it there was growing up an Anabaptism of another kind," notes Norman Cohn, "in which the equally ancient tradition of militant millenarianism was finding a new expression."³² Cohn has in mind the Münster Kingdom set up by extreme Chiliasts or Millenarians. They constituted a kind of psycho-religious opportunist community which took advantage of the spiritual atmosphere of the time. They were a revolutionary movement, a sort of "Maccabean Christianity,"³³ operating contrary to Anabaptist principles of peace and nonviolence.

The immediate inspiration of this movement was anchored in the geographically wide-ranging missionary activities of the religious zealot, Melchior Hofmann, the apocalyptic dreamer and "smooth-tongued speaker who was celebrated for his great calling and commission" in Strassburg.³⁴ Although Hofmann himself was a man of peace, his disciples were less so and took matters into their own hands. Even a non-Anabaptist like Andreas Karlstadt (1477-1541), the spiritual erudite of Wittenberg, had a significant influence on all sorts of dissenting spirits of the time, not least on the Schwärmer.³⁵ But the real roots of the revolutionaries of Münster must be traced back to the Zwickau Prophets, a

³² Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages, rev. and exp. edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 254.

³³ Littell, The Free Church, p. 26.

³⁴ Obbe Philips, "A Confession," in Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, eds. George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957), p. 208; Christian Lievestro, "Obbe Philips and the Anabaptist Vision," Mennonite Quarterly Review 41 (1967), 99-115.

³⁵ Cf. the study by Ronald J. Sider, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt (Leiden: Brill, 1974).

radical triumvirate made up of Nikolaus Storch, Markus Thomä Stübner, and Thomas Drechsel.³⁶ Behind all of them lurked the militant character of Thomas Müntzer, who was himself deeply impressed by the fantastic dreams and visions of the Zwickauer and, like them, not an Anabaptist.

All of them, however, had spiritualistic and apocalyptic leanings. They possessed an endless quest within their own spirits to fathom and feel the words and workings of the divine Spirit towards conquest of their human limitations. The event character, rather than the theologizing trait, became their norm. They were a sect within a larger sectarian movement. Not much unlike some modern charismatics, the revolutionary Schwärmer wanted more than the written Word of God: they wanted to experience direct revelation from God by feeling and seeing it in the realities of life. They individualistically craved the possession and exercise of a final authority lodged in a word from God which would be beyond dispute and error.

Müntzer himself was profoundly inflated by such a spirit. While his friends considered him a "true and loyal proclaimer of the gospel," his enemies saw in him the "devil incarnate."³⁷ So blinded and confused he was, said Luther of Müntzer, that he could neither "see nor hear but stood there dense and darkened like a rock."³⁸ Judged by his revolutionary views, Müntzer has been accused of being "a millinnerian [sic] enthusiast, and eloquent demagogue,"³⁹ a "subjective and fantastic interpreter of Scripture" guided by "visions,

³⁶ Williams, Radical Reformation, pp. 44-58.

³⁷ Hans-Jürgen Görtz, ed., Profiles of Radical Reformers (Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1982), p. 29.

³⁸ Johann Georg Walsch, ed., Dr. Martin Luthers sämtliche Schriften, vol. 13, part 2, Die Haus-Postille nach Georg Röher (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1892), p. 2571; cf. vol. 23, p. 1215.

³⁹ Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, vol. 7: The German Reformation, reprint (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 381; cf. p. 442.

dreams, and ecstasies,"⁴⁰ and one deeply committed to act as a "Rebell in Christo."⁴¹ His role behind the Peasant Uprising in 1525 corroborates those accusations.

The visionaries of Zwickau combined an inward mysticism with outward radicalism. Says Schaff:

These Zwickau Prophets . . . boasted of visions, dreams, and direct communications with God and the Angel Gabriel, disparaged the written word and regular ministry, rejected infant baptism, and predicted the overthrow of the existing order of things, and the near approach of a democratic millennium.⁴²

Obbe Philips (1500-1568),⁴³ a strong Evangelical in Holland during the 1530s and a contemporary eyewitness of the Chiliastic movement, has characterized the spirit of the time. There were many besides the Zwickau Prophets, writes Philips, who "stood firmly by visions, dreams, and prophecies." These visionaries not only comforted themselves "with lies and false promises," they even claimed to have "spoken with God, others with angels--until they got a new trek under way to Münster."⁴⁴ The real leaders of that trek were true sons of the earlier Müntzer and the later Hofmann, not sons in the flesh but in spirit. They were such chiliastic fanatics as Jan Matthijs (+1538) and Jan van Leyden (+1536), the king of Münster. The trek was treacherous and the fate of the movement tragic. In June 1535, thousands of innocent people became victims of violence. Their leaders were publicly executed, and the militant kingdom of Münster collapsed.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Wappler, Thomas Müntzer in Zwickau, p. 31.

⁴¹ Walter Nigg, Das Buch der Ketzer (Zürich: Artemis-Verlag, 1949), p. 351.

⁴² Schaff, History, vol. 7, p. 381.

⁴³ Christian Neff, "Philips, Obbe," Mennonitisches Lexikon, vol. 3, pp. 359-371.

⁴⁴ Philips, "A Confession," p. 220.

⁴⁵ Robert Stupperich, Das Münsterische Täuferium (Münster in Westfalen: Aschendorfsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1958).

The Genre of Spiritualisten

Much like some Millenarians, the Spiritualists subscribed to a doctrine of ongoing revelation. Men like Caspar von Schwenckfeld (1490-1561)⁴⁶ and Sabastian Franck (1499-1543)⁴⁷ were representatives of this type. Some scholars even put Hans Denck (1500-1527)⁴⁸ into this genre,⁴⁹ whereas others feel that he belongs to the evangelical category.⁵⁰ Again, like the Schwärmer of their own time and some Charismatics of our day, the Spiritualisten wanted more than the written Word: they craved direct revelation from God and emphasized feeling before faith. In their tension with belief and ecstasy they differentiated between the historical Holy Scriptures as the objective Outer Word, and the present experience of revelation as the subjective Inner Word.

It is believed that Denck with his speculative, contemplative, and mystical leanings was the first Anabaptist ever to use this pair of contrasting terms. His understanding of its function was threefold: First, like some other Anabaptists, Denck believed that with regard to the authority of the Scriptures, the Inner Word allowed for a deeper penetration into the meaning of the text than the Outer Word.⁵¹ Second,

⁴⁶ Franz Michael Weber, Kaspar Schwenckfeld und seine Anhänger in den freybergischen Herrschaften Justingen und Opfingen (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1962).

⁴⁷ Christian Neff, "Franck, Sebastian," Mennonitisches Lexikon, vol. 1, pp. 668-674; J. Lindeboom, Een Franc-tireur der Reformatie: Sebastian Franck (Arnhem: Van Loghum Slaterus, 1952).

⁴⁸ Hans Denck, Schriften, 1. Teil: Bibliographie, ed. Georg Baring (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1955); Denck, Schriften, 2. Teil: Religiöse Schriften, ed. Walter Fellmann (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1956); Denck, Schriften, 3. Teil: Exegetische Schriften, Gedichte und Briefe, ed. Walter Fellmann (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1961).

⁴⁹ Williams, Radical Reformation, p. 687.

⁵⁰ John H. Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," Mennonite Quarterly Review 41 (1967), 298-299; Wilhelm Wiswedel, "The Inner and the Outer Word: A Study in the Anabaptist Study of Scripture," Mennonite Quarterly Review 26 (1962), 183-184.

⁵¹ Yoder, "Hermeneutics," p. 298.

he differentiated between the Inner and the Outer Word, calling the former das Wort Gottes (Word of God) and the latter die heilige Schrift (Holy Scripture). Denck wrote shortly before his death in 1527 that he held the Holy Scripture (Outer Word) higher than any human treasure, but not as high as the Word of God (Inner Word).

Die heilige geschrift halt ich uber alle menschliche schätze, aber nitt so hoch alß das wort Gottes, das da lebendig, krefftig und ewig ist, welches aller elementen dieser welt ledig und frei ist; dann so es Gott selber ist, so ist es geyst und keyn buchstab, on fedder und papir geschriben, das es nimmer außgetilgt werden mag. Darumb auch die seligkeyt an die geschrift nit gebunden ist, wie nutz und gut sie immermehr darzu sein mag. Ursach: Es ist der geschrift nit möglich, eyn böß hertz zu bessern, ob es schon gelerter wird.⁵²

Finally, the Scriptures must be read, Denck maintained, but the Word of God can be received and thereby lead mankind to salvation. This is a valid point. One can have salvation without having the Holy Scriptures in written form, for these are accessible only to a literate society, especially the educated. Denck argued that salvation would be too restricted if only those could be saved who could both read the Scriptures and hear (understand) the sermon, which at that time was preached in Latin. If that were the case, all preliterates in an oral society ("alle ungelernten") would have no access to salvation. On the contrary, Denck insisted, every person with a frommes hertz (pious heart) and eyn rechter funck götlichs eifers (a genuine spark to seek after God) could receive the Word and be on his way to salvation.⁵³

The Genre of Antitrinitarians

This special type of Left Wing Reformers was made up of rational humanists, known as Unitarians, commonly called Socinians. Their major preoccupation, at least theologically, was the doctrine of the Trinity, which they either doubted or

⁵² Denck, Schriften, 2. Teil, p. 106; cf. Fast, Der linke Flügel, p. 198. The orthographic inconsistencies in the text are in the original.

⁵³ Denck, Schriften, 2. Teil, p. 106; cf. pp. 106-108.

sought to correct or altogether rejected.⁵⁴ Unlike other Anabaptist types who were basically of Germanic ethnicity, the leaders of the Antitrinitarians were in their early stages almost exclusively of Romance origin. Men like Michael Servetus (c.1511-1541) and Giovanni Valentino Gentile (1520-1566) were among the best known.⁵⁵

Although their disputes revolved around Christology, they were perhaps less anti-Trinity than anti-Calvin, especially after Servetus was burned at the stake with Calvin's approval.⁵⁶ Thus it appeared to them that the Genevan Reformer had effaced Jesus Christ of all the features inherent in the loving and forgiving, compassionate and suffering Son of Man. They perceived that the Mainstream Reformers, especially Calvin, had overemphasized the transcendent divinity of Christ at the expense of his immanent humanity and compassion. When Servetus was executed at the hands of the Reformed Genevans, their christological position was only reinforced and eventually led to hard-core Socinianism.⁵⁷

The Antitrinitarians spread rather rapidly eastward into Poland and northward into Holland and North Germany. Here the Evangelical Anabaptists under the leadership of Menno Simons took a clear stand against this doctrine. In his Confession of the Triune God⁵⁸ and in a pastoral letter to the church in Groningen, Simons pleaded with his "dearest brethren and sisters in the Lord" to take careful heed, lest they be "misled and enticed by novelties wherewith to hurt and harm the Christian evangelical love, peace, and unity."

⁵⁴ Fast, Der linke Flügel, p. 363f.

⁵⁵ Williams, Radical Reformation, pp. 743-756; cf. 615-638.

⁵⁶ Williams, Radical Reformation, pp. 605-614.

⁵⁷ Williams, Radical Reformation, pp. 757-763.

⁵⁸ Menno Simons, The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, trans. from the Dutch by Leonard Verduin and ed. by John C. Wenger, with a biography by Harold S. Bender (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1956), pp. 489-497.

He urged the church to uphold the "divine honor of God, the heavenly Father, and His blessed Son together with the Holy Ghost."⁵⁹

If there is any trace of Antitrinitarianism among later Mennonites in general and Mennonite Brethren in particular, it is not classical Socinianism, which rejects the biblical Christology; rather it neglects (but never rejects) the New Testament doctrine of the Holy Spirit. But more about that later.

The Genre of Evangelical Anabaptists

Because of their intense orientation in the New Testament, especially the Gospels, and because of their deep commitment to mission, I have opted to use the term "Evangelical Anabaptists"⁶⁰ and treat this fourth genre of the Stepchildren under a separate heading. These Evangelicals, especially the followers of Menno Simons, were the direct precursors of the Mennonite movement on Continental Europe, in America, and in Russia. Due to persecution and oppression in Europe they became a people in diaspora, beginning as early as the sixteenth century.

As noted earlier, Blanke has distinguished four types of Anabaptists: the Swiss, the Hutterites, the Melchiorites, and the Mennonites. I follow this pattern with some modifications based on geographical distribution and confessional cohesion.

The Swiss Brethren

According to the best records available,⁶¹ the first Anabaptist group emerged on January 21, 1525, in the private

⁵⁹ Simons, Complete Writings, pp. 1036-1037.

⁶⁰ Littell points out that the designation, "Evangelical Anabaptists" has been applied to them because some authors rightly find the terms "Täufer" and "Wiedertäufer" too restrictive. The Anabaptist View of the Church, p. 195, n. 5.

⁶¹ Fritz Blanke, "The First Anabaptist Congregation: Zollikon, 1525," Mennonite Quarterly Review 27 (March 1953), 33; Fritz Blanke, Brothers in Christ, trans. by Joseph Nordenhaug (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1966).

home of Felix Mantz (1480-1527)⁶² in Zollikon by Zürich. The occasion was the request of a Catholic priest named Jorg Cajakob, commonly known as Georg Blaurock (c.1480-1529),⁶³ that Konrad Grebel (c.1498-1526),⁶⁴ a converted humanist, baptize him upon his confession of faith. Grebel consented and baptized Blaurock, who in turn performed the same rite on other adult participants in a house meeting.⁶⁵ In his "Reminiscences," Blaurock himself reports that he first had discussed at length questions concerning the evangelical faith with Zwingli, "but accomplished nothing."⁶⁶ Subsequently, he heard of Grebel and Mantz, joined them at a meeting and talked to them about matters of faith. This conversation has been recorded by a third party:

They came to one mind in these things, and in the pure fear of God they recognized that a person must learn from the divine Word and preaching a true faith which manifests itself in love, and receive the true Christian baptism on the basis of the recognized and confessed faith, in the union with God of a good conscience, [prepared] henceforth to serve God in a holy Christian life with all godliness, also to be steadfast to the end in tribulation. And it came to pass that they were together until fear (angst) began to come over them, yea, they were pressed (gedrungen) in their hearts. Thereupon,

⁶² Ekkehard Krajewski, Leben und Sterben des Zürcher Täuferführers Felix Manz, 2nd ed. (Kassel: Oncken, 1958), pp. 72-85.

⁶³ J. A. Moore, Der starke Jörg: Die Geschichte Jörg Blaurocks des Täuferführers und Missionars (Kassel: Oncken, 1955), p. 13f.

⁶⁴ Harold S. Bender, Conrad Grebel 1498-1526: Founder of the Swiss Brethren (Goshen, IN: The Mennonite Historical Society, 1950); John L. Ruth, Conrad Grebel: Son of Zürich (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1975).

⁶⁵ There is not absolute agreement but overwhelming evidence that January 21, 1525, was the actual birthdate of the Anabaptists. Cf. Blanke, Brothers, pp. 7-20; Blanke, "The First Anabaptist Congregation," pp. 17-33; Wolfgang Schäufele, Das missionarische Bewusstsein und Wirken der Täufer (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1966), p. 12; Moore, Der starke Jörg, p. 13; Krajewski, Mantz, pp. 77-78; Bender, Grebel, pp. 136-138.

⁶⁶ George Blaurock, "Reminiscences of George Blaurock," in Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, eds. George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957), p. 43.

they began to bow their knees to the Most High God in heaven and called upon him as the Knower of hearts, implored him to enable them to do his divine will and to manifest his mercy toward them. For flesh and blood and human forwardness did not drive them, since they well knew what they would have to bear and suffer on account of it. After the prayer, George Cajacob arose and asked Conrad to baptize him, for the sake of God, with the true Christian baptism upon his faith and knowledge. And when he knelt down with that request and desire, Conrad baptized him, since at that time there was no ordained deacon (diener) to perform such work. After that was done the others similarly desired George to baptize them, which he also did upon their request. Thus they together gave themselves to the name of the Lord in the high fear of God. Each confirmed (bestätet) the other in the service of the gospel, and they began to teach and keep the faith. Therewith began the separation from the world and its evil works.⁶⁷

Blaurock's report goes on to state that the group in Zürich soon attracted numerous influential personalities from other countries. Among them was Balthasar Hubmaier (c.1482-1528),⁶⁸ the founder of Moravian Anabaptism and Reformer of Nickolsburg. Then there were Wolfgang Ulimann (+1528),⁶⁹ the chief spokesman of the Stepchildren in St. Gall, and Ludwig Haetzer (1500-1529),⁷⁰ the Hebraist, a fellow worker of Hans Denck in South Germany. All of them, says Blaurock, were "well instructed in the German, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew languages, very well versed in Scriptures, some preachers and other persons who were soon to have testified with their blood."⁷¹ But the more they were persecuted, the more rapidly they spread throughout Europe.

The Swiss Brethren had initially been the most faithful disciples of Zwingli. They "came directly out of a larger group of Reformers called the 'Zwingli Circle.'"⁷² They had

⁶⁷ Blaurock, "Reminiscences," pp. 43-44.

⁶⁸ Stayer, Anabaptists and the Sword, p. 141.

⁶⁹ Stayer, Anabaptists and the Sword, pp. 110-111,

⁷⁰ Christian Neff, "Haetzer, Ludwig," Mennonitisches Lexikon, vol. 2, pp. 225-231.

⁷¹ Blaurock, "Reminiscences," pp. 44-45.

⁷² Davis, Anabaptism and Asceticism, p. 67.

come to a living faith through the biblical preaching of the Zürich Reformer, who in turn praised them for being people die im Worte Gottes arbeiten,⁷³ i.e., who seriously study the Word of God. This group was soon violently suppressed, yet it outlived both persecutors and persecution. Such endurance, contends John Howard Yoder, is "a testimony to the inner coherence of its spiritual character. Outwardly, however, the Schleithem Articles [02-24-1527] were the vehicle of the coherence" and the guiding principles of the movement.⁷⁴

The South German Anabaptists

This movement originated under the fiery, evangelistic preaching of Hans Hut in Augsburg. But its more stable leaders were men like Pilgram Marpeck and Leupold Scharnschlager (+1563), both refugees from Tirol.⁷⁵ What the Schleithem Confession was for the Swiss Brethren, the Augsburg Conference (August 20, 1527), known as the "Martyr Synod," was for the South German Brethren: It gave them a sense of theological identity and ecclesiastical cohesiveness. The Augsburg Synod, however, was more missionary in character than the Schleithem meetings six months earlier had been. The brethren in Augsburg named fourteen missionaries who were to be sent out into Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Unfortunately, within two years these missionaries and most of the conference leaders were apprehended and executed.⁷⁶ Yet its missionary activities had not ended as we will see in the next chapter.

⁷³ Blanke, Aus der Welt der Reformation, p. 73.

⁷⁴ Paul Peachy, "The Radical Reformation, Religious Pluralism, and the Corpus Christianum," in The Origins and Characteristics of Anabaptism/Les Debuts Et Les Caracteristiques De L'Anabaptisme, ed. Marc Lienhard (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), p. 12.

⁷⁵ Gerhard Hein and William Klassen, "Scharnschlager, Leupold," The Mennonite Encyclopedia, vol. 4, pp. 443-446.

⁷⁶ Christian Neff, "Augsburger Täufergemeinde," Mennonitisches Lexikon, vol. 1, pp. 92-96.

The Hutterian Brethren

They were so named after Jakob Huter (+1536). Because of severe persecution in Tirol, these Evangelicals fled eastward and found refuge with Anabaptists in Moravia. Here they established the practice of a common purse, the so-called Bruderhof, a designation known to this day, even in the American Midwest and on the Canadian Prairies where the Hutterites have established themselves as exclusive socio-economic communities with religious overtones.⁷⁷

The Mennonites

Melchior Hofmann had brought some form of Anabaptist teaching to Holland where Menno Simons (1476-1561)⁷⁸ was one of the converts. Simons became the Anabaptist leader from whom the worldwide Mennonite movement has taken its name--except in Holland where it is called Doopsgezinde.

Simons was a converted Roman Catholic priest from the village of Witmarsum in Friesland. He went through an agonizing spiritual struggle for eleven years (1525-1536). Two other leaders were the Phillips brothers, Obbe and Dirk. Simons' writings, particularly his Fundamentbuch or Foundation of Christian Doctrine (1539), bear eloquent testimony to his knowledge of the Scriptures, insight into history, and acquaintance with theology.⁷⁹ Reading Simons, one makes the intriguing discovery that his drive for renewal and vision for reform was nurtured more by the

⁷⁷ A. J. F. Zieglschmid, Die älteste Chronik der Hutterischen Brüder (Ithaca, NY: The Cayuca Press, 1943). This monumental work of more than a thousand pages contains a large compilation of documents dating back as far as 1573 and is the most reliable source for Anabaptist/Hutterite history. For a more recent record see Arnold M. Hofer, Hutterite Roots (Freeman, SD: Pine Hill Press, 1985).

⁷⁸ Cornelius Krahn, Menno Simons (1496-1561): Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und Theologie der Taufgesinnten (Karlsruhe: Heinrich Schneider, 1936); Simons, Complete Writings; Harold S. Bender, Menno Simons' Life and Writings (Scottdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1944).

⁷⁹ Simons, Complete Writings, pp. 103-226.

writings of late medieval Roman Catholic pietists--such as the Brethren of the Common Life--than by either Swiss or German Anabaptists.

Marks of the Evangelicals

Some scholars have argued that there was little, if any, connection between the Evangelical Anabaptists and the more ecstatic, heretical types. Others have tried to point out real affinities. Bullinger and some modern historians have gone so far as to assert that Müntzer was the founder, and central Germany the birthplace and cradle of the Anabaptist movement.⁸⁰ In the light of both original sources and recent scholarships, Bullinger's contention finds little support and must be abandoned.⁸¹ But what, we may ask, set the Evangelical Anabaptist-Mennonites apart from other groups of the Stepchildren?

The Peace Position

The Evangelicals, with rare exceptions,⁸² were deeply committed to peace and nonviolence. In his letters addressed to Müntzer, Grebel and his colleagues in Zürich pleaded with him to follow the teachings of the Scriptures and to refrain from violence in all his reformatory attempts. The first letter stated the position of the Swiss Brethren in this regard and appealed to Müntzer to suffer for the sake of Christ rather than to resort to any form of violence

⁸⁰ Cf. Williams, Radical Reformation, p. 80; J. Van den Berg, "Die pluralistische Gestalt des kirchlichen Lebens in den Niederlanden," in Pietismus und Reveil, eds. J. Van den Berg and J. P. Van Dooren (Leiden: Brill, 1978), pp. 102-117; Stupperich, Das münsterische Täufertum, pp. 10-26; Heinold Fast, Heinrich Bullinger und die Täufer (Weierhof, Pfalz: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1959), pp. 92-106.

⁸¹ Stupperich, Das münsterische Täufertum, p. 11.

⁸² Balthasar Hubmeier did not share the peace position with the other Evangelicals. Cf. Stayer, Anabaptists and the Sword, p. 141ff.

whatsoever.⁸³ In a postscript to the second letter Grebel added this exhortation:

Do not act, teach or establish anything according to human opinion, your own or that of others, and abolish again what has been so established; but establish and teach only the clear word and practices of God with the rule of Christ . . . unadulterated baptism and unadulterated Supper, as we have touched upon in the first letter, and upon which thou art better informed than a hundred of us. If thou and Carlstadt, Jacob Straus and Michael Stiefel^[84] do not give sincere diligence to it (as I and my brethren hope that you will do), it will be a sorry gospel that has come into the world.⁸⁵

The most "powerful testimony that peace as a way of life is the only option for those attempting to live faithfully as the people of God" in this world is expressed in the Schleitheim Confession, drafted and signed February 24, 1527.⁸⁶ The articles speak clearly of "false brothers and sisters"⁸⁷ who indulge in patterns of living which are "flatly counter to the command of God," including the use of "diabolical weapons of violence--such as sword, armor, and the like."⁸⁸

⁸³ Grebel's first letter to Müntzer is dated September 5, 1524. There is no evidence, however, that Müntzer ever received it. Leonhard von Muralt and Walter Schmid, eds., Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer, vol. 1: Zürich (Zürich: S. Hirzel Verlag, 1952), pp. 13-19; Conrad Grebel, "Letters to Thomas Müntzer," in Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, eds. George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957), pp. 73-83.

⁸⁴ The Michael Stiefel referred to by Grebel was a Lutheran professor of mathematics at Jena. "On mathematical-apocalyptic grounds [he] set the date for the end of the world, October 19, 1533." Williams and Mergal, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 85, n. 46.

⁸⁵ Williams and Mergal, Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, p. 85.

⁸⁶ The Schleithem Confession, trans. and ed. John H. Yoder (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1977), p. 3.

⁸⁷ The Schleithem Confession, p. 9.

⁸⁸ The Schleithem Confession, pp. 12-13.

In 1535, Simons wrote to "all true brethren of the covenant" in diaspora concerning the blasphemies and unbiblical practices of Jan van Leyden of Münster.⁸⁹ He stated emphatically that the Evangelicals would have nothing to do with van Leyden as king and his love for sword, rebellion, retaliation, vengeance, polygamy, and the visible kingdom of Christ on earth.⁹⁰

The Church Concept

The Evangelicals also differed from other types in their concept of the church. Müntzer, for example, was a "reformer without a church."⁹¹ And Hofmann, an individualistic prophet with a burning zeal for the spiritual kingdom, stood without the benefit of a brotherhood solidarity. Everything related to church in Hofmann's writings had to do with bride and bridegroom in figurative language; the church was highly allegorical and eschatological, expressed only in mystical, metaphorical, symbolical, or spiritual terms.⁹²

Even a man like Sebastian Franck of the Spiritualistic genre propagated a rather nebulous church concept. In his letter to John Campanus, Franck stated that right after the death of the apostles the visible "outward church of Christ, including all its gifts and sacraments . . . went up into heaven and lies concealed in the Spirit and in truth." Therefore, he argued, he was "quite certain that for fourteen hundred years now there has existed no gathered church nor any sacrament."⁹³

⁸⁹ Simons, Complete Writings, p. 33f.

⁹⁰ Simons, Complete Writings, p. 547.

⁹¹ Eric W. Gritsch, Reformer without a Church: The Life and Thought of Thomas Muentzer 1488-1525 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967).

⁹² Kawerau, Melchior Hofmann, pp. 84, 115-120.

⁹³ Sebastian Franck, "A letter to John Campanus" (1531), in Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, eds. George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957), p. 149.

In contrast to such aberrations, the Evangelicals had a high view of the Believers' Church. The Swiss, South German, and Dutch Mennonites were committed to the brotherhood-type Believers' Church. This meant several things: (a) the church is free; it is a Freiwilligkeitskirche.⁹⁴ Only adults who repent of their sin and voluntarily accept baptism join together in a believing fellowship. (b) The church is visible. It consists of people committed to Nachfolge or discipleship under Christ's Lordship. The heart of this mutual Anabaptist-Mennonite principle is best expressed in the words of Hans Denck, who stated that one must first become a disciple before one can be a disciple. "No one can truly know Christ as Lord, unless he follows him in life."⁹⁵ (c) The church is a brotherhood. There was a strong sense of covenant with one another expressed in a spirit of mutual care, responsibility, and accountability. "According to my small talent," said Simons regarding the Münsterites, "I warned everybody against their error and abomination, just as I would want other people to do for my soul."⁹⁶ A believer in covenant is always his brother's keeper. This calls for the application of discipline according to the rule of Christ (Mat. 18:15-22). (d) The church is missionary; it is a pilgrim people in the world. Suffice it to say at this point that, as a pilgrim people, the Anabaptists conceived of the church as having been

⁹⁴ Van der Zijpp, "The Conception of Our Fathers Regarding the Church," Mennonite Quarterly Review 27 (1953), 93.

⁹⁵ Cf. John H. Yoder, "The Prophetic Dissent of the Anabaptists," In The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to Harold S. Bender, ed. Guy F. Hershberger (Scottdale; Herald Press, 1962), p. 100. The famous Anabaptist-Mennonite motto quoted by Yoder has been condensed from Denck's following words: "Das mittel aber ist Christus, welchen nyemand mag warlich erkennen, es sei dann, das er ihm nachvolge mit dem leben. Und niemand mag im nachvolgen, dann sovill er ihn zuvor erkennt. Wer in nit erkennt, der hat in nit, und mag on in zum vatter nit kommen." Denck, Schriften, 2. Teil, p. 45.

⁹⁶ Simons, Complete Writings, p. 547.

called out of the world to be different from it, yet always being sent back into the world to witness in it, as I will show in the next chapter.

The Classical Confessions

Unlike the rational Antitrinitarians, the Evangelicals adhered to the theological view of the Trinity as formulated in the classical confessions. In his treatise "On Free Will," Hubmaier argued that man has come to the capacity of free choice between good and evil "because he has been awakened by the Word of God." By this Word, he explained, the Heavenly Father comforts and punishes, his dear Son restores and makes whole, and the Holy Spirit enlightens, "as the three principal articles of our Christian faith referring to God the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit show."⁹⁷ In a theological discourse entitled, "Solemn Confession of the Triune, Eternal, and True God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost," Menno Simons presented a profound statement of faith, which gives evidence of his familiarity with the theological language and arguments in support of the classical creeds.⁹⁸

A Biblical Hermeneutic

The key issue which set the Evangelicals apart from other Anabaptist genres was their biblical hermeneutic. These Biblizisten⁹⁹ constituted the "church of radical Bible readers"¹⁰⁰ submitted to the authority of the written Scriptures and, contrary to the Schwärmer, refused to rely on new inspiration and revelation. Grebel charged Müntzer to "preach only the divine Word" and "esteem as good and

⁹⁷ Balthasar Hubmaier, "On Free Will," in Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers, eds. George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957), p. 124.

⁹⁸ Simons, Complete Writings, pp. 547-549.

⁹⁹ Blanke, Aus der Welt der Reformation, p. 72.

¹⁰⁰ John A. Toews, "Eine Gemeinde radikaler Bibelleser," Mennonitisches Jahrbuch 1975, p. 17.

right only what may be found in pure and clear Scripture." Again he said, "Whatever we are not taught by clear passages or examples must be regarded as forbidden," and whatever Christ has bidden his messengers "in the Old and especially in the New Testament" must be proclaimed as God's Word.¹⁰¹ But before it can be proclaimed, they insisted, it must be studied. And study they did, using the original languages as well as translations in their own tongues. In reading both Old and New Testaments they discovered that the New transcends the Old in its moral requirements and its revelation of God through Christ.¹⁰²

Menno Simons refused to be identified with those who claimed to have visions and receive revelations. "I am not one who sees visions, I am no prophet who can teach and prophecy otherwise than what is written in the Word of God and understood in the Spirit."¹⁰³

Three principles of interpretation are noteworthy: First, the christological principle.¹⁰⁴ Taking the phrase, "the perfection of Christ" as a pivotal point in the Schleitheim Confession, Myron Augsburger has formulated the following axiomatic principles:

The Anabaptists had a Christocentric hermeneutic, refusing to regard the Bible as on a "flat plane," taking progressive revelation with a seriousness which saw a "completed faith" in Christ, and interpreted the entire Bible through Him.¹⁰⁵

There is a Christological center in the Anabaptists' interpretation of Scripture. They viewed the inspired Scriptures as God's unfolding revelation with Christ being both content and culmination and, therefore, the key to

¹⁰¹ Grebel, "Letters to Thomas Müntzer," p. 75.

¹⁰² Ruth, Conrad Grebel, p. 89.

¹⁰³ Simons, Complete Writings, p. 310.

¹⁰⁴ Myron Augsburger, Principles of Biblical Interpretation (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1968), pp. 21-29.

¹⁰⁵ Augsburger, Biblical Interpretation, p. 19.

understand both Testaments. The writings of Sattler, Grebel, and Simons corroborate that thesis¹⁰⁶ and can be summarily taken as an expression of a Confession of Faith from around 1600 found in the Martyrs Mirror:

The Old Testament is to be expounded by and reconciled with the New Testament and must be distinctively taught among the people of God: Moses with his stern, threatening, punishing law over all sinners as still under the law; but Christ with His new, glad tidings of the holy Gospel over all believing penitent sinners as not under the law, but under grace.¹⁰⁷

While they strongly affirmed the unity of both Testaments as God's full revelation to mankind, they accepted the teachings of the New Testament as the ethical standard for daily living. The Old Testament was seen as the shadow, the New Testament as the realization of what God wanted for his church. Pilgram Marpeck referred to the Old Testament era as "yesterday" and that of the New Testament as "today."¹⁰⁸

At times the Anabaptists seem to belabor the primacy of the New Testament over the Old, though they recognized the whole of Scripture as divine and necessary.¹⁰⁹ According to Simons, everything within "true evangelical faith" is to

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Michael Sattler, "How Scripture Should Be Discerningly Exposed," in The Legacy of Michael Sattler, trans. and ed. John H. Yoder (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1973), pp. 150-177; Grebel, "Letters to Thomas Muntzer," pp. 73-85; Simons, Complete Writings, pp. 220, 312.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted by Augsburg, Biblical Interpretation, p. 22; cf. Thieleman J. Van Braght, The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror of the Defenseless Christians, trans. from the 1660 Dutch edition by Joseph Sohm, 9th ed. (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1972), p. 382.

¹⁰⁸ Marpeck wrote a monumental work of over 800 pages on the relationship between the two Testaments, entitled, Testamentserläuterung. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1978), p. 555f; cf. Augsburg, Biblical Interpretation, p. 25; John C. Wenger, "Biblicism of the Anabaptists," in The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to Harold S. Bender, ed. Guy F. Hersberger (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1962), p. 177.

¹⁰⁹ Davis, Anabaptism and Asceticism, p. 216.

be judged in conformity with "the perfect example of Christ."¹¹⁰ Simons took his own injunction so seriously that he quoted the New Testament three and a half times more often than the Old; and 40 percent of the New Testament citations are from the Gospels.¹¹¹

Second, the communal principle. Their strong sense of brotherhood led not only to a spirit of fellowship and corporateness in areas of caring and serving, but also to a deep consciousness of mutual accountability in the understanding and interpretation of the Scriptures. This has been referred to as the principle of the "hermeneutic community."¹¹² It is not the individual who claims a special revelation, but the entire congregation that reads, hears, interprets, and understands the Scriptures. No one is compelled to keep silent, and sophisticated scholars must explain themselves to simple brothers and sisters. This is not to deny the role of leadership of itinerant preachers and local shepherds.¹¹³ But all are allowed to hear the Word and each other until it seems "good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28).

Finally, there is the missiological principle of hermeneutics. This has recently been discovered and formulated by Gottfried Gerner in a scholarly treatment of the Anabaptists' intensive interaction with the Scriptures in relation to mission. Gerner states that the specific hermeneutic of the Anabaptist movement was a hermeneutic of the apostolic, of the irresistible being-sent-consciousness, of the missionary character. Whatever advances mission became key for interpretation.¹¹⁴ More about that in the next chapter when the centrality of the Great Commission will be treated in some detail.

¹¹⁰ Simons, Complete Writings, p. 343.

¹¹¹ Davis, Anabaptism and Asceticism, p. 216.

¹¹² Franklin H. Littell, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Group Decisions," Mennonite Quarterly Review 34 (1960), 75-96.

¹¹³ Yoder, "Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," p. 302, n.9.

¹¹⁴ Gottfried Gerner, "Folgerungen aus dem täuferischen Gebrauch der Heiligen Schrift," Mennonitsische Geschichtsblätter 31, Neue Folge 26 (1974), 24.

Chapter 3

ANABAPTIST MISSION DYNAMICS

Introduction

When Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714) wrote his monumental Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie, he lamented the fact that the Anabaptist writings were simply not available. As a result, asserted Arnold, scholars and common people alike believed false accusations spoken against the Anabaptists.¹ Thanks to the renaissance of the Täuferforschung (Anabaptist research) by prominent scholars in Europe and America, the sources have been recovered and part of the historical record has been set straight. Theologians and church historians are cognizant of this course of correction, but missiologists have paid little attention to it.

My reason for dealing with the Anabaptist mission dynamics in this study is not so much to supply the missing chapter in mission history, as to provide historical background and a missiological point of reference against which to test Mennonite Brethren mission thinking several centuries later. In so doing I limit myself to the following considerations: I will (a) make two historiographical observations, (b) examine the underlying philosophy of the Anabaptists' mission dynamics, (c) consider the centrality of the Great Commission, (d) state briefly the Anabaptist compelling mission consciousness, and (e) conclude with the scope of their mission activity.

¹ Gottfried Arnold, Unparteiische Kirchen- und Ketzerhistorie vom Anfang des Neuen Testaments bis auf das Jahr Christi 1688, 2 vols. in four parts, reprinted from the 1729 Frankfurt edition (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1967), Vol. I, p. 732; cf. pp. 717-722; Vol. II, pp. 1180-1204.

Historiographical Observations

Both mission dimension and mission intention of the Anabaptist movement as a model for Mennonite Brethren mission thinking three centuries later must be seen in historical perspective. That calls for two historiographical observations.

Mainline Reformers and Mission

I suggest three distinguishable views currently held with regard to the Mainline Reformers' position on mission. One is what I have termed "the Warneck tradition."² Gustav Warneck (1834-1910) unequivocally asserted that the Reformers were not only indifferent to the practice of world mission, but that even the idea of mission was totally removed from their thinking.³ He formulated more than a dozen reasons to support his thesis. Many historians have shared this negative view, including the late Kenneth Scott Latourette.⁴ They have repeated what Warneck said, adding no significant new substance to the Warneck tradition.⁵

A second view is that the Reformers were, indeed, mission minded. As early as 1897, Warneck met his first opponent in Paul Drews, who maintained that the Reformers' position on mission was not to be assessed in terms of theory, structure, and motivation. It must rather be seen in actual content and methodology, namely the spontaneous expansion of

² Hans Kasdorf, "The Reformation and Mission: A Bibliographical Survey of Secondary Literature," Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research 6 (October 1980), 170-175.

³ Gustav Warneck, Abriß einer Geschichte der Missionen von der Reformation bis auf die Gegenwart, 7th ed. (Berlin: Martin Warneck, 1901), pp. 1-20.

⁴ Latourette offers nothing new. He simply endorses Warneck's thesis. Kenneth Scott Latourette, A History of the Expansion of Christianity, 7 vols., CEP edition, vol. 3: Three Centuries of Advance 1500-1800 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), pp. 25-27.

⁵ Cf. Kasdorf, "Reformation and Mission," pp. 170-171.

the church by the faithful preaching of the gospel.⁶ More recently, scholars on both sides of the Atlantic have endorsed and advocated Drews' positive view.⁷ Their thesis is that the question whether the Reformers were indifferent to mission cannot be answered with a simplistic yes or no. Such approach would be historically tainted. Only those still adhering to a nineteenth-century mission mentality, they note, could possibly support the negative Warneck tradition. But those who are prepared to shed the colonial vestiges and move beyond that era of interpretation will have to make "a somewhat painful readjustment" in their view of the Reformers' attitude to mission.⁸

The third view is a neutral position. One of the first persons to treat critically and historically the Reformers' view of mission was Albert Ostertag of the Basel Mission.⁹ His research antedated Warneck's first essay by at least twenty-five years. Ostertag's thesis is that ever since the apostolic era the church has never been devoid of mission, for mission has always been its very life. At times such life has been weak, to be sure, yet it has always been present. Even Luther occasionally talked about preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, contended Ostertag, and Melanchthon challenged the church to do so.¹⁰ The historians and theologians who support this neutral position, however objective they claim to be, tend to lean toward the negative Warneck tradition,

⁶ Paul Drews, "Die Anschauungen reformatorischer Theologen über die Heidenmission," Zeitschrift für praktische Theologie 28 (1897), 291ff.; 317ff.

⁷ For a historiography of the Reformers' view of mission see Kasdorf, "Reformation and Mission," pp. 170-171, 174-175.

⁸ Hans-Werner Gensichen, "Were the Reformers Indifferent to Missions?" in History's Lessons for Tomorrow's Missions (Geneva: World Student Christian Federation, [1961]), p. 120.

⁹ Albert Ostertag, "Die deutsche Reformation und ihr Verhältnis zur Basler Mission," Evangelisches Missions-Magazin, Neue Folge 1 (1857), 7-34.

¹⁰ Ostertag, "Die deutsche Reformation," p. 11.

rather than to Drews' positive view with regard to the Reformers' attitude toward mission.¹¹

But all three views have disregarded the Reformation Stepchildren and their contribution to mission during the decades of religious fermentation in Europe.

Distorted Mission History

The lamentable disregard for Anabaptist mission during the Reformation has given a distorted picture of mission history. Readers of such college and seminary texts as Warneck's Abriß einer Geschichte der protestantischen Missionen von der Reformation bis auf die Gegenwart (ten editions between 1882 and 1910), Gareis' Geschichte der evangelischen Heidenmission (1901), Carver's Course of Christian Mission (1932), Glover's Progress of World Wide Missions (1939), Kane's revised and updated edition of the same (1961), Neill's History of Christian Missions (1971), and Kane's Global View of Christian Missions from Pentecost to the Present (1971), find no mention of the Anabaptist mission whatsoever.¹² Latourette's History of Christianity (1953) and Flachsmeier's Geschichte der evangelischen Weltmission (1963) make minor exceptions. While Latourette devotes two chapters to the Stepchildren and notes that the "missionaries of the movement were numerous,"¹³ Flachsmeier dedicates barely two lines to the "Wiedertäufer und Schwarmgeister, die ihre Zeit gekommen

¹¹ Kasdorf, "Reformation and Mission," pp. 170-171.

¹² Robert R. Glover, The Progress of World Wide Missions (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1924); J. Herbert Kane, Global View of Christian Missions from Pentecost to the Present (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1961); Stephen C. Neill, A History of Christian Missions (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1971); Horst R. Flachsmeier, Geschichte der evangelischen Weltmission (Giessen: Brunnen, 1963); Warneck, Abriß; Reinhold Gareis, Geschichte der evangelischen Heidenmission mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der deutschen (Konstanz: Karl Hirsch, 1901); William Owen Carver, The Course of Christian Mission: A History and an Interpretation (New York: Revell, 1932).

¹³ Kenneth Scott Latourette, History of Christianity (New York: Harper, 1963), p. 781.

glaubten, nun ihre besonderen Lehren auszubreiten."¹⁴ Such comments do less than justice to the movements' mission dynamic, yet that is all he has to say.

The reason for the overwhelming silence about Anabaptist mission must be seen either in lack of diligence or deliberate omission on the part of mission historians. But in serious scholarship there should be cause for neither, especially in recent years when the resources are easily available.

Underlying Philosophy

In recent decades missiologists have begun to take seriously mission theory and practice of the early Anabaptists.¹⁵ As I seek to analyze the historical context in which the movement emerged and operated, several fundamental concepts can be identified which undergird the motives of Anabaptist mission consciousness and evangelistic witness in the world.

New Life in Christ

The question whether a personal decision to be a Christian was precondition for baptism, church membership, and communion had become virtually irrelevant through the practice of pedobaptism in mainline churches. Equally unimportant had become questions about the true inner experience of the new life in Christ, the voluntary commitment to Jesus as Lord, and the free submission to a covenant relationship in the visible community of believers. The Reformers left it open for each individual to decide whether "truly to believe," yet that true inner decision was to remain hidden and treated as "a secret between each man and

¹⁴ "The Anabaptists and enthusiastic spirits believed that their time had come to propagate their peculiar teachings." Flachsmeier, Geschichte der evangelischen Weltmission, p. 96.

¹⁵ Wolfgang Schäufele's monumental work, Das missionarische Bewußtsein und Wirken der Täufer based on South German sources is to date by far the most comprehensive study on the subject. (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag des Erziehungsvereins, 1966).

God."¹⁶ They perceived of the new life as something private, manifested primarily in vertical dimensions, but hidden to the human observer in the ecclesia invisibilis.¹⁷

Not so for the Anabaptists. They insisted on personally experiencing the new birth by the Holy Spirit. The consequences were at least threefold. For one thing, living out the new life in Christ meant vigilance in maintaining a vertical relationship of radical obedience to God. Furthermore, it meant the deliberate entering of a horizontal covenant relationship with the visible Christian Gemeinde of fellow believers. Moreover, from this vertical and horizontal relationship followed a third dimension, namely the relationship to the non-Christian world. The latter had profound ethical and missionary implications. It is thus legitimate to conclude that the Anabaptist mission dynamic derived its strongest impulse from the reality of the new life in Christ.

Manifestations and interpretations of this new life came as a result of a genuine spiritual restoration, an authentic revival movement. "We thereby understand the sudden occurrence of a religious awakening," notes Fritz Blanke, "in which not just a few individuals but a considerable number are gripped by a personal Christian disposition to repentance and breakthrough to the piety of salvation."¹⁸

¹⁶ John H. Yoder, "Reformation and Missions: A Literature Review," Occasional Bulletin from the Missionary Research Library 22 (June 1971), 5.

¹⁷ Martin Luther defended the concept of the invisible church on the basis of the article: "I believe in one holy Christian church." Such believing, Luther argued, is not based on a visible, tangible object that can be seen with eyes and touched with hands; the church can only be perceived by faith hidden in baptism, sacrament, and the Word. Johann Georg Walsch, ed., Dr. Martin Luthers sämtliche Schriften, new ed., vol 13 (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1892), pp. 1175, 1444f.; vol. 17, p. 1338; vol. 18, pp. 1349, 1445, 1469. The Reformed Creed differentiates clearly between the "invisible church of the elect" and the "visible church" which consists of all those who "profess the true religion, and of their children." John H. Leith, ed., The Creeds of the Churches, rev. ed. (Atlanta: Knox, 1977), p. 222.

¹⁸ Fritz Blanke, Brothers in Christ, trans. Joseph Nordenhaug (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1966), p. 32.

Neither the Lutheran nor the Reformed component of Protestantism perceived the Christian life in the same way, at least not until Pietism came along more than a century later--and even then only as an extra-church phenomenon of an ecclesiola in ecclesia.¹⁹

Fundamental to the Anabaptists' concept of the new life was their view of sin, repentance, faith, and forgiveness. Much like the Lutheran Pietists later in history, the Anabaptists insisted that life can and must be transformed and changed from a way of sinfulness to a walk of holiness by the grace of God. There are two sides to this change: one is theological, the other experiential. The first is explained best in writings, the second in court testimonies.

Menno Simons distinguished four kinds of sin humankind has to contend with. First, there is the "sin which is inherited at birth by all descendants and children of corrupt, sinful Adam, and is not inaptly called original sin." Second, imbedded in original sin (singular), according to Simons, lies the power of causation of sinful acts, namely the "sins [which] are the fruits of this first sin" (Gal. 5; Rom. 5; Eph. 5).²⁰ Third, there are the "sins [of] human frailties, errors and stumblings which are still found daily among saints and regenerate ones, such as careless thoughts, careless words, and unpremeditated lapses in conduct."²¹ Finally, there is

¹⁹ Cf. Martin Schmidt, Wiedergeburt und neuer Mensch: Gesammelte Studien zur Geschichte des Pietismus (Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1969); Dale Brown, Understanding Pietism (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), p. 20; Hans Kasdorf, "Anabaptism and Pietism: Two Radical Christian Movements in Church History," unpublished paper, UNISA, Pretoria, 1983, pp. 43-45; Albrecht Ritschl, Geschichte des Pietismus, 3 vols. (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1880-1886), vol. 1, p. 22.

²⁰ Menno Simons, The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, trans. from the Dutch by Leonard Verduin, and ed. by John C. Wenger, with a biography by Harold S. Bender (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1956), p. 563. A detailed treatment of the sin question is also offered by "Pilgram Marpeck's Confession of 1532," in The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck, trans. and ed. by William Klassen and Walter Klaassen (Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1978), pp. 107-157.

²¹ Simons, Complete Writings, p. 564; cf. Marpeck, Writings, pp. 108-109.

"the sin against the Holy Spirit," which Simons defines as a deliberate renouncement of "all knowledge and grace," a conscious rejection of "the will, Word, power, and work of God." This sin is committed by those who purposely "trample upon the Son of God, deem the blood of the New Testament unclean, and profane the Spirit of grace."²²

But there is hope: original sin can be broken, actual sin forgiven, and the sinful lapses in conduct confessed and removed through the power of Christ's "righteousness, intercession, death and blood."²³ Although Simons warns that there is no forgiveness for the sin against the Holy Spirit (Num. 15; Mt. 12; Lk. 12; Mk. 3; Heb. 6), he also pleads "not to make a mistake in such a case by premature and unreasonable judgment." All of those who have a "broken, contrite, and penitent heart once more," says Simons, have not committed the unpardonable sin and will be forgiven.²⁴

The Anabaptist concept of sin and lostness on the one hand and their understanding of God's grace and forgiveness on the other are further elucidated in their court testimonies before civil authorities of the time. The court records abound with stories that clearly reflect the depth of sin consciousness of individuals and groups. Men and women were seen as lost sinners, unable to stand up before the absolute and final judgment of God, unless they have been forgiven. Hans Bruggbach "clagte und beweinte sine sünd." He related in a court hearing how he had literally lamented and wept over his sin at conversion, asked his friends to pray for him to God, and besought them to give him the sign of baptism "in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit."²⁵ Jörg Schad testified that he had lived all

²² Simons, Complete Writings, pp. 564-565.

²³ Simons, Complete Writings, pp. 563-565.

²⁴ Simons, Complete Writings, p. 565.

²⁵ Leonhard von Muralt and Walter Schmid, eds., Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz (Zürich: S. Hirzel Verlag, 1952), Vol. 1, p. 40.

his life in sin and vices. But upon prayer for grace and upon confessing his sin, God had promised to forgive him. Again, it is reported in court records of Rudolff Breitingen how he and several others were one day walking towards Zollikon. Suddenly, so says the report of Breitingen, "da stunde er still, fiengi an weinen and sine sünd beklagenn." Similar conversion stories of contrition and confession are recorded by Konrad Hottinger, Hans Ockenfuß, and many others.²⁶

It is striking that baptism followed immediately after repentance. In fact, baptism was seen as making an end "to the struggle of repentance" and as bringing "release from the heavy load of sin," resulting in a new life in Christ.²⁷ The new life in Christ, the Evangelical Anabaptists maintained, meant a total and concrete change of loyalty: neither civil magistrate nor religious superior, but Jesus Christ alone was seen as Lord.

The implications of submission to the Lordship of Christ and the meaning of the gospel went beyond confessional church creeds. At this point the dividing line between the Protestant Reformers and their Evangelical Stepchildren was most sharply drawn. The Anabaptists were convinced that the Reformers, whatever their profession and intention may have been, failed to "secure among the people true repentance, regeneration and Christian living as a result of their preaching."²⁸ The new life in Christ, they contended, must find expression in character and relationships. These

²⁶ Muralt and Schmid, Quellen, p. 41ff.

²⁷ Blanke, Brothers in Christ, p. 33. Konrad Grebel wrote in a letter to Thomas Müntzer (Sept. 5, 1524) that the new life in Christ must bear fruit. The person who has had his "sins washed away . . . by faith and the blood of Christ" must walk "in newness of life and spirit." George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal, eds., Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957), p. 80.

²⁸ Harold S. Bender, The Anabaptist Vision (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1976), p. 16. Bender presented this epoch-making address as president of the American Society of Church History to that Society in December 1943. It originally appeared in the journal, Church History 13 (March 1944), 3-24.

relationships, in turn, must be demonstrated by word and deed, faith and practice, attitude and action. The key concept for that kind of Christlike living was contained in the phrase Nachfolge Christi, discipleship of Christ, regardless of its cost to the Nachfolger. Bender explains:

It was a concept which meant the transformation of the entire way of life of the individual believer and of society so that it should be fashioned after the teachings and example of Christ. The Anabaptists could not understand a Christianity which made regeneration, holiness, and love primarily a matter of intellect, of doctrinal belief, or of subjective "experience," rather than one of the transformation of life. They demanded an outward expression of the inner experience. Repentance must be "evidenced" by newness of behavior.²⁹

This understanding of new life in Christ gave rise to their evangelistic fervor in the world. Discipleship led to disciple making. They felt that if natural sinfulness of mankind led to eternal perdition, and if repentance of sin resulted in forgiveness and salvation, then those who had thus experienced such transformation must glorify God by seeking the same for others. Simons put it this way:

Before God in Christ Jesus, we neither seek nor desire anything more than that we may turn the whole world which lies in sin from its wickedness to the right way, and that we may by the Word, grace, and power of the Lord deliver many souls from the kingdom of the devil and gain them to the kingdom of Christ; that we may lead a pious, humble, and godly life in Christ Jesus, and that we may glorify His great and glorious name forever. We firmly believe and confess that all false doctrine, idolatry, ungodliness, and sin are of the devil, and that the reward of sin is everlasting death. Therefore we labor diligently and earnestly, and desire, the Lord knows, to be pious and to fear God.³⁰

Understanding of the Church

The Anabaptists' understanding of the church was as basic to their involvement in mission as was their concept of new life in Christ. Like Protestantism, Anabaptism was an ecclesiastical movement. But, as I have pointed out in the

²⁹ Bender, Anabaptist Vision, p. 20.

³⁰ Simons, Complete Writings, p. 549.

previous chapter, the Stepchildren were more like a sect-type, a brotherhood-type than an institutional-type church. Unlike Protestantism, which could be perpetuated by the practice of pedobaptism, the Anabaptist church could survive only through active evangelism. Such convictions led to a church concept that was totally different from that of the Mainline Reformers and caused the movement to become highly ecclesiocentric in terms of both the internal dimension of maintenance and the external intention of mission.³¹

Crucial to their understanding of the church was the concept of freedom or voluntarism. The church was, as the Anabaptists viewed it, a Freiwilligkeitsgemeinde.³² This had to do with the fundamental issue of separation between church and state. In the magisterial and territorial state churches the person had no choice whether or not to belong to the church. Those of Roman Catholic parentage, for example, were baptized as infants and automatically became Roman Catholic Church members. Those born of Protestant parents living in Protestant territory were by the same token Protestants.

The Anabaptists saw the church and state as having completely different mandates and functions in society. John C. Wenger has masterfully contrasted the two concepts as understood by the Reformers on the one hand and the Anabaptists on the other. The Anabaptists, says Wenger,

regarded the state as having a merely human head, while the head of the church was Christ. The state included all men, good and evil, while the church was made up of the regenerated, the true believers. The state is entered by the natural birth, while the church is entered . . . by conversion and the new birth. The function of the state is to maintain law and order, while that of the church is to evangelize the world and to create a body of Christian disciples who obey the Word of God and thus exhibit his will before men. The

³¹ Hans Kasdorf, "The Church Concept of the Mennonite Brethren in Anabaptist Perspective," unpublished Master's thesis, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno, California, 1972, pp. 27-33.

³² Kasdorf, "Church Concept," p. 29; cf. Van der Zijpp, "The Conception of Our Fathers Regarding the Church," Mennonite Quarterly Review 27 (1953), 92.

state controls by law while the church is governed by the Word and Spirit of God. . . . The state will end with the return of Christ, while the church has before it an eternity of glory.³³

Voluntarism in the church implied conscious choices whether or not to belong to it. Adult people who had experienced the new birth were always faced with the question of the new way of life. A forgiven sinner had not only been reconciled and restored to fellowship with God, but to a new relationship with fellow-believers as well. This dual relationship of a reconciled person expressed the profoundest meaning of salvation. "For the disciple there is no such thing as an isolated Christian in a lonely cell. To him brotherhood is not merely an ethical adjunct to Christian theological thinking, but an integral condition for any genuine restoration of God's image in man."³⁴ Forgiven sinners in community and in fellowship with one another were, they felt, the closest representation of Holy God in Trinity. For that, too, was a fellowship, a community in Trinity.³⁵

Thus the doctrine of the Gemeinde as a reconciled and mutually responsible brotherhood of believers was at the very heart of Anabaptist mission dynamic. For brotherhood did not just happen; it had to be created and guarded. That for them demanded internal maintenance through nurture and discipline in the church, and external mission through evangelism and witness by the church in the world.

Another way of seeing the church was that of a Glaubens-gemeinde, a Believers' Church. This was a vision the Reformers had originally advocated quite strongly but were unable to carry through. Thus we may conclude that, while Luther eventually abandoned his earlier dream of establishing

³³ John C. Wenger, Even Unto Death: The Heroic Witness of the Sixteenth Century Anabaptists (Richmond: Knox, 1961), p. 86.

³⁴ Robert Friedmann, The Theology of Anabaptism (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1973), p. 81.

³⁵ Hans Kasdorf, "God's Triunity Is a Community," The Christian Leader, April 26, 1983, p. 16.

a church of people "who want to be Christian in earnest and who profess the gospel with hand and mouth,"³⁶ and while Zwingli³⁷ and Calvin³⁸ established a theocratic church-state system in their native cantons, the Evangelical Stepchildren not only retained the original vision of Luther, but actually realized it by giving shape and content to it, and by making it part of their total experience.

Interpretation of History

Another basic principle of the Anabaptist mission dynamic lay in their view of history. They interpreted church history markedly differently from both the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Reformers. Although they held to linear historical continuity in general, they viewed church history in terms of periodization. The first period was perceived as the golden age: the time of the early and primitive church from the apostles to Constantine. The second period began with what they saw as the fall of the church under Constantine, ushering in an era of a broken church in union with the state. Finally, there had come the time of restitution, which began with their own separation

³⁶ Martin Luther, Luther's Works, vol. 53: Liturgy and Hymns, ed. Ulrich Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), p. 64. "Luther's dilemma was that he wanted both a confessional church based on personal faith and experience, and a territorial church including all in a given locality. If he were forced to choose, he would take his stand with the masses, and this was the direction in which he moved." Roland Bainton, Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 242.

³⁷ Zwingli talked about "Die Kirche in ihrer doppelten Bedeutung," in Der Glaube der Reformatoren: Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, ed. Franz Lau (Bremen: Carl Schünemann, 1964), pp. 272-273.

³⁸ Calvin's church language is highly spiritualistic and metaphorical. He sees the church as the "mother" who must "conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and . . . keep us under her care and guidance." Jean Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. by John McNeill and trans. by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), Vol. 2, p. 1016.

from Catholic and Protestant state churches.³⁹

When the Constantinian Edict of Toleration of Christianity was proclaimed (313)⁴⁰ and the Theodosian benevolent corpus juris formulated (381-395) in favor of the Christian movement,⁴¹ the church had through its own bishops not only entered a despotic state-church alliance, but also assumed full catholicity by claiming exclusive custodianship of universal salvation. With the coronation of Charles the Great by Pope Leo III on December 25, 800, the power of the secular potentate had reached its apex: Charlemagne had formed an imperial theocracy in which the papacy was to perform a major role. The state-church despotism of the Constantinean-Theodosian era had now been replaced by a religious church-state despotism, soon to be known as the "Holy Roman Empire," with supremacy lodged in the imperium.⁴²

Both the Reformers and the Anabaptists were concerned about this alignment, yet both saw it through different spectacles and interpreted it in very different terms. On the one hand, the Reformers rejected the Roman Catholic claim that the institutional church alone had the right to salvation as upheld and distributed through its exclusive administration of the sacraments. On the other hand, they claimed their historical continuity by assuming for themselves the right to elect and authorize their own ecclesiastical leaders to carry on the sacred traditions of the church, albeit in somewhat narrower parameters. What had become historically universal for the Roman Catholic Church was now taking on regional and

³⁹ Franklin H. Littell, The Macmillan Atlas History of Christianity (New York: Macmillan, 1978), p. 85.

⁴⁰ Eusebius Pamphilus, Eusebius Ecclesiastical History, trans. Christian Frederic Cruse, 8th reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), pp. 426-431; cf. 393, 438.

⁴¹ Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, vol. 3: Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity A.D. 311-600, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 63-67, 110-111, 638f.

⁴² Kurt D. Schmidt, Kirchengeschichte, 7th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1979), pp. 194-227.

provincial dimensions for the Reformers. But the synthesis of church and state remained fundamentally unchanged. While the secular-ecclesiastical alignment of Catholicism was seen as a universalized imperial church, that of the Lutheran and Reformed was being confined to a territorially localized magisterial church. The principle of this new territorial system was juridically laid down in the maxim of the cujus regio, ejus religio, the details of which were spelled out in the Diet of Speier (1526), achieved at the Peace of Augsburg (1555), and given permanence at the Peace of Westphalia (1648).⁴³

The Anabaptists renounced both claims to territoriality, the universal as well as the regional. As far as they were concerned, nothing had changed. The state and the church were still united, resulting in an "unholy church" rather than in a "holy empire." They interpreted this existing corpus Christianum as the result of a spiritual fall of the church. In this historically perceived fall the church was viewed as having been absorbed by the world and the world as now living in the church. They viewed this amalgamation of church and state as empty formalism and spiritual laxity. The main reason, they claimed, was that "infants were being baptized into Christianity before their understanding was mature enough to give the association any content."⁴⁴

Such condition could not be remedied by reformation; it had to be renewed by restitution. Thus "their objective was not to introduce something new but to restore something old," namely the distinctly otherness of discipleship as seen in

⁴³ Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, vol. 7: The German Reformation, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 683-687; Roland Bainton, The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), pp. 141-159; John H. Yoder, Täuferium und Reformation im Gespräch (Zürich: EVZ-Verlag, 1968), pp. 60-65.

⁴⁴ Franklin H. Littell, "The Anabaptist Theology of Missions," Mennonite Quarterly Review 21 (1947), 11.

the life and teaching of the New Testament church.⁴⁵ This meant a much more revolutionary break with tradition than the Reformers were prepared to accept. It also meant that the institutional church was largely a worldly society and therefore a mission field in need of the gospel. As far as the Anabaptists were concerned, the so-called "Christians" were just as much in need of repentance and conversion as the Turks and other pagan peoples.⁴⁶

This is not to say that the Evangelicals were ahistorical. It does mean that they perceived history much more in prophetic than in traditional terms. They saw themselves as a uniquely prophetic people, a people of the kingdom of God with a divine task in a world upon which God had already passed judgment.⁴⁷

Because God wanted to have a unique people separated from all other peoples, he has again caused the true morning star, the light of his truth to break forth in full brightness in these latter times of the world, focusing especially on the German nation and land in order to visit them with his word and to reveal among them the foundation of divine truth.⁴⁸

This meant aggressively calling men and women to repentance--even those within the corpus Christianum--in order to bring about the true church patterned after the New Testament people of God.⁴⁹ They had little concern for the passing things of this world and its earthly kingdoms, but they had great confidence in the visible Believers' Church as a manifestation of both the present and the future

⁴⁵ Franklin H. Littell, The Anabaptist View of the Church: A Study in the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism (Beacon Hill, Boston: Starr King Press, 1958), p. 47; Yoder, Täuferium und Reformation, pp. 65-70; Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, vol. 8: The Swiss Reformation, reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), p. 71.

⁴⁶ Littell, Atlas History of Christianity, pp. 28, 85.

⁴⁷ Littell, The Anabaptist View of the Church, p. 133.

⁴⁸ Quoted by Schäufile, Das missionarische Bewußtsein, p. 57.

⁴⁹ Yoder, Täuferium und Reformation, pp. 41, 65f.

kingdom of God. "The Anabaptists believed that they were forerunners of a time to come, in which the Lord would establish His people and His law throughout the earth," and thereby give the church and its mission clear visibility on the map of world history.⁵⁰

Centrality of the Great Commission

As noted earlier, none of the Mainline Reformers gave serious consideration to the mission of the church in their time. In fact, they argued that the Great Commission was binding only to the original apostles and had been carried out by them in the first century. Not so the Reformation Stepchildren. They rejected the notion that the gospel had been preached to all peoples by the apostles and that they were now fully absolved from missionary responsibility.

Primary Texts

The Anabaptists lived centuries before any modern school of biblical criticism had subjected the texts of the Synoptic tradition to critical investigation.⁵¹ They accepted the biblical record at face value, questioning neither its original authenticity nor its current validity. As far as they were concerned, the Great Commission was to be obeyed. They had no choice; it was binding on all followers of Christ. As more recently in the modern missionary movement since Carey, the Anabaptists treated the Great Commission as a kind of mini-canon within the larger biblical canon. Yet unlike so many modern Evangelicals, they saw in the words

⁵⁰ Littell, The Anabaptist View of the Church, p. 109.

⁵¹ The most insightful essay on the Great Commission from a missiological perspective is by professor David Bosch, "A Structure of Mission: An Exposition of Matthew 28:16-20," in Exploring Church Growth, ed. Wilbert R. Shenk (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 218-248. Bosch not only deals with the text, but also with usage and application in missiological writings. The bibliographical references are an excellent resource for further investigation. Cf. Karl Barth, "An Exegetical Study of Matthew 28:16-20," in The Theology of the Christian Mission, ed. Gerald H. Andersen (Nashville: Abingdon, 1961), pp. 55-71.

of Jesus the implications not only for individual salvation,⁵² but for the costly way of personal and corporate discipleship under Christ's exclusive lordship.⁵³

The three great mission texts most frequently quoted by the Evangelical Anabaptists are the following:

The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. (Ps. 24:1 NIV)

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age." (Mt. 28:16-20 NIV)

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe; In my name they will drive out demons, they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it. (Mk. 16:15-20 NIV)

Judging from the primary emphasis the Anabaptists gave to this particular collection of pericopes, it appears as a testimony of mission history that they, and not the modern missionary movement beginning with Pietism in 1675 or with William Carey in 1792, were the first body of Evangelical

⁵² I am referring here to such interpretation of the Great Commission as those by Samuel M. Zwemer, Into All the World (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1943); Robert D. Culver, "What Is the Great Commission?" Bibliotheca Sacra 125 (1968), 239-253; David M. Howard, The Great Commission for Today (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1976); cf. Hans Kasdorf, "Teaching the Great Commission," in Called to Teach: A Symposium by the Faculty of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, ed. David Ewert (Fresno: Center of Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1980), pp. 115-142.

⁵³ Littell, The Anabaptist View of the Church, p. 19f.

Christians for whom the Great Commission became the ultimate text, motivating the church to mission.⁵⁴

"No words of the Master," notes Littel, "were given more serious attention by the Anabaptist followers than His final command."⁵⁵ Littel is right. Checking the index to Scripture references in Anabaptist sources makes it overwhelmingly clear that the Matthean and Marcan versions of the Great Commission are cited more frequently than any other texts.⁵⁶

Important Discovery

The Anabaptists seem to have discovered the Great Commission in their quest for biblical teaching on baptism. About a month before they baptized any believers, Felix Mantz addressed the issue in his Protestation and Schutzschrift (December 1524) written to the Council of Zürich.⁵⁷ As he focused on his new understanding of Christian baptism, he

⁵⁴ For an interpretation of the Great Commission in Protestant mission thinking see items listed in footnotes Nos. 51 and 52, and Gustav Warneck, "Der Missionsbefehl als Missionsinstruction: Versuch einer missionsmethodischen Auslegung von Matth. 28, 16-20 in Verbindung mit Mark. 16, 15," Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift 1 (1874), 41-49, 89-92, 137-151, 185-194, 233-239, 281-290, 377-392.

⁵⁵ Littel, "Anabaptist Theology of Missions," p. 12.

⁵⁶ The Täuferakten in Strassburg, covering the years from 1531-1535, cite the Great Commission in whole or in part at least forty-five times, twenty-three times from Matthew's and twenty-two from Mark's Gospel. Manfred Krebs and Hans Georg Rott, eds., Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer, vol. 8, part 2 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1960), p. 547. A similar source for the Bernese Anabaptists cites Matthew 28:18f. seventeen times and Mark 16:15f. twelve times. Martin Haas, ed., Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1974), p. 486. A perusal of the writings by Balthasar Hubmaier reveals the same data. Cf. Gunnar Westin and Torsten Bergsten, eds., Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer, vol. 9 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1962), pp. 227-352.

⁵⁷ Muralt and Schmid, Quellen, vol. 1, pp. 23-28. For a translation of the document into modern German see Heinold Fast, ed., Der linke Flügel der Reformation: Glaubenszeugnisse der Täufer, Spiritualisten, Schwärmer und Antitrinitarier (Bremen: Schünemann, 1962), pp. 28-35.

discovered the missionary mandate, namely that believers' baptism presupposes faith, and that faith results from the preaching of the gospel. It is through preaching, said Mantz, that Christ has annulled sin from Adam to the present. Therefore, compelled by this new insight, Mantz wrote again to the Council of Zürich on February 18, 1525, just one month after the Anabaptist Church had been founded in his home, saying,

Christ has sent forth his disciples and commanded them to go, teaching all peoples that all power had been given to Him by God His Father, and that all who would call on His name and believe (vertruwē) in Him would experience forgiveness of their sins. And as an external sign He commanded baptism. When I was teaching exactly the same, some people came to me in tears, begging me that I should baptize them. I could not deny them that request, but did as they desired and called on the name of Christ for them. After that I continued to teach them that they should live in love, harmony and fellowship, sharing all things as we read in Acts 2 [42-47]; that they should always be mindful of the death of Christ and never forget His shed blood which He visibly demonstrated during the Evening Meal; that we too [should] break bread and drink wine together in memory of our redemption through His body and cleansing by His blood; and that we should be united one with another as brothers and sisters in Christ our Lord.⁵⁸

This quotation contains a whole theology of the new understanding of church and the sacraments.⁵⁹ But what is even more significant for us is the connection Mantz discovered between baptism and mission. The Anabaptists had a unique view of salvation history from Adam to Christ, always applying it to themselves and weaving it into the broader context of world history. As they retold the salvation story to others, they too were affected. A revival occurred and a chain reaction was set in motion. Thus the mission was

⁵⁸ Muralt and Schmid, Quellen, vol. 1, pp. 49-50.

⁵⁹ Heinold Fast, "Das täuferische Verständnis des Missionsbefehls Jesu," Mennonitisches Jahrbuch 1982, pp. 9-18. For an English version see Heinold Fast, "The Anabaptist Understanding of Jesus' Great Commission," Mission Focus 11 (March 1983), 4-7.

already in progress when they discovered that they themselves were missionaries, with the world their mission field.⁶⁰

Hermeneutical Significance

The Anabaptists used Luther's translation of the Great Commission. As we know, Luther relied on the Vulgate rather than the Greek text.⁶¹ He translated the charge matheteusate as "teach all nations," as opposed to "make disciples of all nations" in modern versions (Mt. 28:19). Thus the sequence in Matthew was seen in three stages: teach, baptize, and teach. But in Mark four stages were noted: preach, believe, baptize, and be saved (Mk. 16:15-16). The concept of discipling, however, was clear to the Anabaptists: according to Matthew, disciples are made by baptizing and subsequent teaching, but there is also the subjective element expressed by Mark, namely believing before baptizing; and believing is preceded by preaching (Mark) or by teaching (Matthew, according to Luther).⁶²

Thus the formulation of the sequence to preach to all people, to baptize those who believe, and to continue teaching those who are baptized was the Anabaptists' basis for insisting on believers' baptism and became their motivation for mission. The theology of this sequence in Christ's command to baptize was really lifeblood and pulsebeat of the entire Anabaptist Movement. Recent scholarship has pointed out that the Great Commission is the actual key that unlocked the Scriptures for the Stepchildren:

The specific hermeneutic of the Anabaptists is an apostolic hermeneutic, one of an irresistible sentness (Gesandt-Sein), one of mission. While Luther interpreted the Scripture on the basis of what advances

⁶⁰ Fast, "Das täuferische Verständnis," pp. 11-12.

⁶¹ Cf. Hans Kasdorf, "Luther's Bible: A Dynamic Equivalence Translation and Germanizing Force," Missiology: An International Review 6, No. 2 (1978), 213-234.

⁶² Cf. Gottfried Gerner, "Folgerungen aus dem täuferischen Gebrauch der heiligen Schrift," Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter 31, Neue Folge 26 (1974), 25-43.

Christ (was Christum treibet), it can be said of the Anabaptists that they interpreted it by what advances the course of mission (was missionen treibet).⁶³

To a critical mind of today it may appear that the Anabaptists saw too much in the Great Commission. But they were bibli-cists focusing on obedience in life rather than on academic intellectualism in hermeneutics.

Ultimate Authority

From the centrality of the Great Commission also emerged the fundamental question of authority and power to forgive sins. Mantz put it this way to the civil authorities in Zürich:

Upon the clearest instructions of God and the administration of Him who manages and supervises everything has come Christ Jesus to annul the fall of Adam. We would all be dead in him if God had not sent His Son and given Him all authority in heaven and on earth so that every one who would call on His name and trust (vertruwen) in Him could have eternal life.⁶⁴

For the Anabaptists, then, the locus of ultimate authority rested neither with ecclesiastical nor with temporal powers, but with the risen and enthroned Christ in whom God had invested "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Mt. 28: 18). Did not the whole earth and its entire content belong to the Lord of creation? (Ps. 24:1). How could the kind of faith through which people were to be saved, by which they were to live, and for which many were willing to die, be determined by civil and religious rulers in a given region? Was not the gospel to be preached to every creature in all the world, and were not those who believed to be baptized? (Mk. 16:15). What if people in these given regions defined by the authority of an earthly despot did not have the gospel? Whom were the Anabaptists to obey, the powers that be or the Lord of heaven and earth? Their answer was repeated many times: "Our faith stands on nothing other

⁶³ Fast, "Das täuferische Verständnis," p. 12; cf. Fast, "Anabaptist Understanding of Jesus' Great Commission," p. 5.

⁶⁴ Muralt and Schmid, Quellen, vol. 1, p. 49.

than the command of Christ who possesses all authority in heaven and on earth. And who did not say, 'Go, celebrate mass'; but he said, 'Go and preach the gospel.'⁶⁵

At a time when dominant Protestantism was willing to commit 300 little states to a territorial determination of religion, notes one historian, the Anabaptists were sending their missionaries into all corners of the land, wherever they could get a hearing. They lived by their conviction: "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1 RSV).⁶⁶ Since Christ had commanded his disciples to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mk. 16:15 RSV), they argued, no earthly ruler had the right to forbid such proclamation of the good news on the basis of humanly defined and restricted territoriality. The only valid loyalty for the Christian was his unreserved allegiance to Jesus Christ, the "potentate in heaven and earth," as an early Anabaptist-Mennonite Confession puts it.⁶⁷

Unlimited Mission Scope

The Great Commission was also central in the Anabaptist understanding of the whole world as a mission field. They rejected the notion of the corpus Christianum in which the church is merely a religious arm of the state. In contrast to popular Protestant mission theology, they took very seriously the negative implications such union had for world mission.

⁶⁵ "Dann Christus hat zu seinen Jüngern nit gesagt: geet hin vnd haltent die Mess, sondern: geet hin vnd prediget das Euangelion." Josef Beck (ed.), Die Geschichts-Bücher der Wiedertäufer in Österreich-Ungarn, 1526-1785 (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1967), pp. 64-65; cf. Littell, Anabaptist View of the Church, p. 111.

⁶⁶ Littell, Anabaptist Theology of Missions, p. 10.

⁶⁷ The test of the "Confession of Faith, According to the Holy Word of God" is dated 1600 and recorded in the Martyrs Mirror by Thieleman J. van Braght, trans. from the 1660 Dutch ed. by Joseph F. Sohm (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1972), p. 392; cf. pp. 372-410.

The Anabaptists would not have agreed with Warneck, the father of Protestant missiology,⁶⁸ who has sought to justify the territorial union of church and state and to place it outside the boundaries of the ethne as the gentile mission field. He cites more than fifty references from the New Testament where the plural form ethne and the singular ethnos (also ethnikos) occur. He concludes that the overwhelming evidence points to ethne meaning "gentiles," in a religious sense, and not "peoples" in an ethnic sense. But he also sees in the texts a twofold meaning, a "Doppelsinn," or "Doppeldeutung," as he says. Since the singular ethnos is never used to designate a singular gentile or pagan (for which ethnikos is used), and since pas Israel as a people frequently stands in opposition to panta ta ethne, the latter must be seen as gentile peoples. Warneck concludes that the Great Commission must be seen in an ethnoreligious as well as in an ethnographic context which for him legitimizes the limitations of missionary Christianization activities to areas outside the already established Christian regions.⁶⁹

Loyal to the historical principle of territoriality, Warneck insists that "only those peoples are a legitimate missionary object who are still outside God's revealed salvation in Christ and in whose territory the church is yet to be planted." Then he adds:

At the time Jesus gave the missionary mandate all of humanity was still without exception a mission territory. But as a result of executing the missionary task a large part of the world's peoples have now entered into a Christian church territory which we therefore exclude from the specific missionary territory.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Hans Kasdorf, "Gustav Warnecks missiologisches Erbe," D.Miss. dissertation, School of World Mission of Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, 1976.

⁶⁹ Gustav Warneck, Evangelische Missionslehre, 2nd ed. (Gotha: Perthes, 1902), vol. 3, pt. 1, pp. 243-285; cf. vol. 2, p. lff.

⁷⁰ Warneck, Missionslehre, vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 2.

While Warneck concedes that there are, indeed, many not-yet-Christians and many no-more-Christians ("Noch-nicht-christen oder Nicht-mehr-christen"),⁷¹ in the existing state church, he contends that the apostolic or missionary mandate is confined only to those "sent beyond the frontiers of (Catholic and Protestant) Christianity in order to extend the kingdom of God to non-Christians on the other side of those frontiers."⁷² Although Warneck nowhere identifies the corpus Christianum with the kingdom of God, he comes close to it. All people within the state-church, he argues, are already Christianized; they carry the name Christian because they have through baptism been received into the general stream of Christianity. Thus they already constitute a Christianized world with Christian institutions and are therefore outside the realm of a mission field; they have no need of being missionized.⁷³

Such explanations would have been totally unacceptable to the Anabaptists. They looked upon the entire known world as a great mission field, "and they sought to evangelize on the comprehensive scale of the great heroes of the past."⁷⁴

Their understanding of the world clearly included the corpus Christianum based on the New Testament dualism of the kingdom. "For them there were two realms, two kingdoms, two worlds."⁷⁵ The kingdom of God is manifested but not yet completed in the corpus Christi and has nothing in common with the corpus Christianum. The two are diametrically opposed. This world is ruled by the devil and those in it

⁷¹ Warneck, Missionslehre, vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 3.

⁷² Gustav Warneck, Evangelische Missionslehre, 2nd ed. (Gotha: Perthes, 1897), vol. 1, p. 2.

⁷³ Warneck, Missionslehre, vol. 3, pt. 1, pp. 2-3; vol. 1, pp. 2-3; vol. 2, p. 3.

⁷⁴ Littell, Anabaptist View of the Church, p. 119.

⁷⁵ John A. Toews, "The Anabaptist Involvement in Missions," in The Church in Mission, ed. A. J. Klassen (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, Mennonite Brethren Church, 1967), p. 87.

have "fellowship with the dead works of darkness" without life or light, as the Schleitheim Confession puts it. But there are also those who are called out of the evil world into the other world, which is the kingdom of God ruled by the Lord of heaven and earth.⁷⁶

The dualistic worldview of Anabaptism is clearly described in early documents. The Schleitheim Confession divides the whole creation into two categories:

Now there is nothing else in the world and all creation than good or evil, believing and unbelieving, darkness and light, . . . God's temple and idols, Christ and Belial, and none will have part with the other.⁷⁷

The same dualism appears in Das grosse Artikelbuch by Peter Walpot (1577):

The difference between the Christian and the world is as vast as that between heaven and earth. The world is world, remains the world, acts like the world, and will always be nothing but the world. But the Christian has been called away from the world, exhorted never to conform to it, never to live in companionship with it, never to run along with the crowd and never to pull its yoke.⁷⁸

Meaning of Witness

Another area in which the Great Commission played a significant role was the Anabaptists' view of the Christian witness as a missionary. "In right faith," notes Littell, "The Great Commission is fundamental to individual confession and to a true ordering of the community of believers. The Master meant it to apply to all believers at all times."⁷⁹

From the earliest Swiss Brethren in Zürich and Zollikon, from the brothers and sisters in South Germany and from the

⁷⁶ John H. Yoder, ed. and trans., The Schleitheim Confession (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1973), p. 11.

⁷⁷ Yoder, Schleitheim Confession, p. 12.

⁷⁸ Lydia Müller and Robert Friedmann, eds., Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer, vol. 12: Glaubenszeugnisse oberdeutscher Taufgesinnter II (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlags-haus Gerd Mohn, 1967), p. 271.

⁷⁹ Littell, Anabaptist Theology of Missions, p. 11.

Austrian movements to the later Mennonites and Hutterites in the northern lowlands and Moravia, the Anabaptists were reduced to crowds of witnessing pilgrims and martyrs throughout greater Europe. Wolfgang Schäufele contributes their amazing success to the witnessing priesthood of a believing brotherhood. He says:

In the Anabaptist Brotherhood, as is well known, there was no distinction between an academically educated ministerial class on the one hand and the laity on the other. Each member was potentially a preacher and a missionary, and each single member had equal opportunity for advancement according to his own competence, just as was the case in primitive Christianity. Luther's "priesthood of all believers" became a practical reality in Anabaptism.⁸⁰

Whenever a person made a commitment to Christ as Lord, he/she actually made a commitment to carry out the Great Commission to the best of his/her ability. Thus not only the special Sendbote or commissioned messenger, but also the ordinary church member was at the time of baptism charged with the responsibility of the expansion of the Christian faith.

Compelling Sense of Mission

The Anabaptists maintained that all must hear and have the opportunity to respond to the gospel, voluntarily become members of the Believers' Church and thus be saved from eternal death. They based their conviction on Romans 10, following the argument of Paul: man can believe only when he hears; he can hear only when someone preaches; preaching is always based on the Word of God and determined by the Church's obedience to the Command of Christ. Therefore, they felt compelled to go and to preach.⁸¹

In his "Meditation on the Twenty-Fifth Psalm" Menno Simons comments, among other things, on the goodness and

⁸⁰ Wolfgang Schäufele, "The Missionary Vision and Activity of the Anabaptist Laity," Mennonite Quarterly Review 36 (1982), 100.

⁸¹ Wilhelm Wiswedel, "Die alten Täufergemeinden und ihr missionarisches Wirken," Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte 40 (1943), 197.

uprightness of the LORD who "instructs sinners in his ways" (Ps. 25:8). In the course of the meditation he becomes overwhelmed by God's "grace, mercy, favor, and peace for all who truly believe on Him." He marvels at Moses, the prophets and the apostles who "heralded forth God's grace"; "who preached the way of repentance and broke the bread of life to the people."⁸² In a compelling manner he adds:

He sent out His messengers preaching this peace, His apostles who spread this grace abroad through the whole world, who shone as bright, burning torches before all men, so that they might lead me and all erring sinners into the right way. O Lord, not unto me, but unto Thee be praise and honor. Their words I love, their practices I follow.⁸³

The deep constraint that motivated the Anabaptists to active mission involvement was based on the sense of calling and sentness.

Berufungsbewußtsein

The compelling mission consciousness of the Anabaptists was above all deeply rooted in a twofold Berufungsbewußtsein or sense of calling. There was first the internal dimension, the charismatic call that came directly from God. "The call to preach the gospel," the Anabaptists believed, "is communicated by the Spirit of God to the spirit of man."⁸⁴ Mantz justified his missionary preaching on the basis of a "direct call from Christ."⁸⁵ Johannes Brötli wrote an apostolic letter from a young church in Hallau to the older church in Zollikon, opening with these words: "John, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to proclaim the gospel of Christ through the will of God the Father, to the pious

⁸² Simons, Complete Writings, pp. 70-71.

⁸³ Simons, Complete Writings, p. 71.

⁸⁴ Wiswedel, "Die alten Täufergemeinden," p. 187.

⁸⁵ Cited by Schäufele, Das missionarische Bewußtsein, p. 150.

Christians . . . grace and peace."⁸⁶ The sources abound with examples of the direct call perceived to be from God to missionize the world.⁸⁷ Not the office as such, but the consciousness of the inner calling and the practical fruitfulness as a demonstration of the same was of primary importance to the Anabaptist missionaries.⁸⁸

In addition to the internal dimension of the call, there was the external dimension, the corporate call that came from the church. As soon as an Anabaptist congregation came into being, it actively participated in confirming the charismatic call of its missionaries or apostles, as well as that of its shepherds. This happened in a twofold process. First, the one called took the initiative of presenting himself to the church. After that he could be confirmed by congregational action as elder, shepherd, preacher, evangelist, or missionary.⁸⁹ We may recognize at this point the Lutheran principle of the local church's role in the election of leadership.⁹⁰ But the Anabaptists carried that principle several steps farther than did Luther.

For one thing, the Anabaptists insisted that the internal, charismatic call must always be a prerequisite for the external confirmation of that call by the church. Gabriel Weinberger, for instance, wrote to the Council of Regensburg that he could and would not accept the church's call to preach unless he was sure that the Lord had called

⁸⁶ Muralt and Schmid, Quellen, vol. 1, p. 44.

⁸⁷ Cf. Schäufele, Das missionarische Bewußtsein, pp. 118-122; Wiswedel, "Die alten Täufergemeinden," pp. 188-190.

⁸⁸ Schäufele, Das missionarische Bewußtsein, p. 122.

⁸⁹ Schäufele, Das missionarische Bewußtsein, pp. 122-124.

⁹⁰ The following are Luther's more important treatments of the ministry: "Concerning the Ministry" (1523) Luther's Works, gen. ed. Helmut Lehmann, vol. 40 (Philadelphia: Muhlenburg Press, 1958), pp. 7-44; "On the Papacy in Rome" (1520) and the ensuing dispute with "The Goat in Leipzig" (1521-1522), as well as his treatise on "The Right of the Christian Assembly to Call Teachers" (1523). Luther's Works, gen. ed. Helmut Lehmann, vol. 39 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), pp. 49f.; 105-238; 301-314.

him first.⁹¹ In his lengthy treatment of the call to service, Simons also insisted on the necessity of the dual call, one from God, the other from the congregation.⁹²

Furthermore, the Anabaptists stressed the spiritual gifts of those called to serve. As God called men through the Holy Spirit, so he also equipped them with spiritual gifts to carry out their calling. "It is the Holy Spirit who works within us the ministry of the apostolic office and the proclamation of the gospel of Christ according to Lk. 24; Acts 1:2; II Cor. 3:5-6; Eph. 3:4; I Pet. 3."⁹³ Moreover, according to the Schleitheim Confession the Anabaptists insisted on the "rule of Paul." That means that only those were eligible for ministry in the church context who also could demonstrate an exemplary Christian life in family and society.⁹⁴

Sendungsbewußtsein

Of equal importance to the conviction of the call was the Anabaptists' consciousness of sentness or commissioning.⁹⁵ This was usually, but not always, done by the

⁹¹ In his defense before the council (April 29, 1540) Weinberger explained his position regarding the prödigambt saying, "ja wan mich auch ain gmain darzue erwölen het, so wolt ichs nit annemen on den peruef des herren. Aber ich waiß und hab erforen, das die gmainen und waren kirchen Cristi oben in landen und unden kaines willens sein, ain prödiger und diener des evangelion zu wölen, er wert dan von got dem vater peruefen und getriben vom heiligen gaist nach zeugnis der schrift und gottes wort." Karl Schornbaum, ed., Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer, vol. 5: Bayern, II. Abteilung (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 1951), p. 107.

⁹² Simons, Complete Writings, pp. 440-454. A wealth of information on the twofold call to church ministry--deacon, evangelist, shepherd, elder--has been compiled by Samuel Henri Geiser, Die Taufgesinnten Gemeinden im Rahmen der allgemeinen Kirchengeschichte, 2nd rev. ed. (Porrentrey: Le Jura S.A., 1971), pp. 345-350; cf. Schäufile, Das missionarische Bewußtsein, pp. 122-129.

⁹³ Wiswedel, "Die alten Täufergemeinden," p. 189.

⁹⁴ Schleitheim Confession, Article V, p. 13; Schäufile, Das missionarische Bewußtsein, p. 130.

⁹⁵ I am here indebted to Schäufile's brief but excellent treatment of the Anabaptists' "Sendungsbewußtsein" in Das missionarische Bewußtsein, pp. 128-134.

congregation. In the early stages of the movement some missionaries were sent by other individuals without congregational participation. Hans Hut, for example, was widely respected as "an apostle sent from God who in turn commissioned others to preach with the same authority as he himself had."⁹⁶ Such missionaries as Leonard Schiemer and Ambrosius Spitelmeier claimed to have been sent by God through his apostle and prophet Hans Hut to evangelize and to baptize.⁹⁷ These were exceptions, however.

In all cases God was recognized as the ultimate Sender who sent Jesus as the missionary par excellence. Jesus, in turn, had all authority to send his apostles, as the Anabaptist missionaries thought of themselves.⁹⁸ One of the frequently quoted passages in this connection is John 20: 21: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." What this meant, explained Simons, was "that all true teachers and preachers are sent of Christ Jesus, as He is sent of the Father."⁹⁹ Blaurock, Mantz, Hut, Caspar Rauchenpüchler, Hans Schmid and many others always defended their right and compulsion to evangelize with the claim before civil authorities that the Lord had sent them by his Spirit to proclaim the Word.¹⁰⁰ This consciousness of being sent by God became a decisive factor in the Anabaptist mission dynamic. In it they found both motive and energy for their dangerous and often fateful activity of witnessing in a hostile environment.¹⁰¹

In most instances it was the corporate body and not an individual who became the responsible and commissioning agent to send workers as missionaries to the world.

⁹⁶ Schäufele, Das missionarische Bewußtsein, pp. 129; 133.

⁹⁷ Schäufele, Das missionarische Bewußtsein, p. 129.

⁹⁸ Schäufele, Das missionarische Bewußtsein, pp. 132-133.

⁹⁹ Simons, Complete Writings, p. 440.

¹⁰⁰ Schäufele, Das missionarische Bewußtsein, pp. 132-133.

¹⁰¹ Schäufele, Das missionarische Bewußtsein, pp. 133-134.

Wiswedel reconstructs a typical Anabaptist commissioning ceremony based on the Graner Codex entitled, "Wie die Brüder des Worts, so in die Land gezogen, von der Gemeinde Urlaub nehmen."¹⁰² To begin with, the candidates told the congregation how God had called them into mission work and to the preaching of the Gospel in "other lands." This was followed by a session of admonition in which the missionaries addressed the congregation and challenged the members to remain faithful in their local tasks of visiting the sick and the imprisoned, of providing for the poor and unemployed, and of remembering them (the missionaries) with prayers and material provisions. Then the people of the congregation pledged their support, wished them well, and prayed for God's mercies upon their itinerant ministry.¹⁰³

Singing played a significant role from the very inception of the Anabaptist movement. Hymns were often written for specific occasions. I have selected and translated four verses from a twenty-five-stanza song composed for an early commissioning service. This song is probably the oldest Anabaptist mission hymn in existence. The words describe the mood of the missionaries, express the theology of mission, and indicate physical risks associated with the missionary task.

1. As God His Son was sending
 Into this world of sin,
 His Son is now commanding
 That we this world should win.
 He sends us and commissions
 To preach the Gospel clear,
 To call upon all nations
 To listen and to hear.
2. To Thee, O God, we're praying,
 We're bent to do Thy will;
 Thy Word we are obeying,

¹⁰² "How the brethren of the Word, who move into the world, take leave from the church." Wilhelm Wiswedel, "Die alten Täufergemeinden und ihr missionarisches Wirken," part 2, Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte 41 (1948), 119.

¹⁰³ Wiswedel, "Die alten Täufergemeinden," pt. 2, pp. 119-120.

Thy glory we fulfill.
 All peoples we are telling
 To mend their sinful way,
 That they might cease rebelling,
 Lest judgment be their pay.

3. And if Thou, Lord, desire
 And should it be Thy will
 That we taste sword and fire
 By those who thus would kill,
 Then comfort, pray, our loved ones
 And tell them, we've endured.
 And we shall see them yonder--
 Eternally secured.

4. Thy Word, O Lord, does teach us,
 And we do understand;
 Thy promises are with us
 Until the very end.
 Thou hast prepared a haven--
 Praised be Thy holy name.
 We laud Thee, God of heaven,
 Through Christ, our Lord. Amen!¹⁰⁴

Commissioning ceremonies were observed by the entire congregation. In most cases the missionaries were married men, leaving wife and children behind. Occasionally, wives accompanied their husbands. In the event that the missionaries would be executed by "sword and fire," as expressed in the song, the sending congregation assumed responsibility to take care of their widows and orphaned children.¹⁰⁵

All this speaks of a profound Sendungsbewußtsein or sense of sentness. Sebastian Franck (1499-1543), friend and critic of the early Anabaptists, was so impressed by their consciousness of mission that he described this aspect of their life as follows: "They wish to imitate apostolic life . . . move about from one place to another preaching and claiming a great calling and mission." Some of them

¹⁰⁴ Hans Kasdorf, "Anabaptists and the Great Commission in the Reformation," Direction 4, No. 2 (April 1975), 312. The original is cited by Wiswedel, "Die alten Täufergemeinden," pt. 2, pp. 121-122.

¹⁰⁵ Schäufile, Das missionarische Bewußtsein, pp. 165-174.

were so sure of their calling, according to Franck, that they felt "themselves responsible for the whole world."¹⁰⁶

Extent of Mission Activity

The scope of the Anabaptist mission activity in those early years is rather astounding. Especially after the Augsburg Missionary Conference (martyr synod), held in August 1527, a deliberate strategy was put into effect.¹⁰⁷ The missionary motto was: "The earth is the Lords." Nothing short of execution could hinder the missionaries from traversing the Lord's territory. Littell observes:

Scores of missionaries traveled from Waldshut throughout Switzerland, from Zurich through the Tyrol and southern Germany, and finally, from Moravia as far as Venice, Amsterdam, and Krakow. Lay evangelists moved among the corner congregations, threading all Europe, and a chain of synods and free gatherings tied the movement together. Occasionally we find rather startling evidence of the wide holding of Anabaptist opinion. A Hutterite missionary was martyred at Aachen, October 19, 1558. When Hans Beck was in prison at Passau, delegates from a Christian brotherhood (Anabaptists?) came from Salonica in Greece and held fellowship with him.

Missioners were bound by Scripture to travel and carry the word, and they were bound by church discipline to be pilgrims for the faith wherever sent.¹⁰⁸

Next to Roman Catholicism, the Anabaptists made the most profound impact on the missionary map of the world before Lutheran Pietism emerged on the ecclesiastical scene of Europe.¹⁰⁹ Although we have no complete record of their missionary achievements, the figures in extant allow us to

¹⁰⁶ Toews, "The Anabaptist Involvement in Missions," p. 95.

¹⁰⁷ Christian Hege, "Märtyrersynode," Mennonitisches Lexikon, 4 vols., vols. 1-3 ed. by Christian Hege and Christian Neff (Frankfurt a.M. und Weierhof, 1913, 1916, 1938); vol. 4 ed. by Harold S. Bender and Ernst Crous (Karlsruhe: Heinrich Schneider, 1958), vol. 3, pp. 53-56.

¹⁰⁸ Littell, Anabaptist View of the Church, p. 122.

¹⁰⁹ Littell, Anabaptist View of the Church, p. 119.

compile data which are characteristic of their evangelistic fruitfulness (Table 1).¹¹⁰

When we look at their methods, we note that the Anabaptists operated on the principle of centripetality as well as centrifugality. They attracted people to themselves by their life style, and they penetrated the social environment by their evangelistic zeal. Much of the extensive mission work revolved around several important congregational centers. One of them was Zürich, the original base of the Swiss Brethren. Under the leadership of Grebel, Blaurock and Mantz the movement spread rapidly and widely in a spontaneous manner to Waldshut, Tyrol, Alsace, Swabia, Nürnberg, Augsburg, and Strassburg.¹¹¹

Waldshut became another important mission center where the eminent theologian and missionary Hubmaier carried out his great, but short-lived, work of reform, evangelism, and church renewal. Under his leadership several missionaries were sent out to other cities, and he himself baptized many believers, including 300 on Easter day, 1525.¹¹²

The third and probably the most important mission center was Augsburg.¹¹³ Here Hut and Denck were in leadership, dividing the land "on a grand map of evangelical enterprise," as Littell puts it. The missionary conference there became the most significant single occasion for concentrated strategy and planned missionary undertaking. Littell adds:

Brethren were sent out from it to centers in South Germany, Switzerland, and Moravia. Those attending included outstanding leaders and missionaries--Denck,

¹¹⁰ Kasdorf, "Anabaptists and the Great Commission," p. 314.

¹¹¹ Fritz Blanke, Aus der Welt der Reformation (Zürich: Zwingli Verlag, 1962), pp. 72-84.

¹¹² Johannes Kessler, "The chronicler of St. Gall called Hubmaier the archikatabaptista. Westin and Bergsten, Quellen, vol. 9, p. 10.

¹¹³ Christian Neff, "Augsburger Täufergemeinde," Mennonitisches Lexikon, vol. 1, pp. 92-96; Christian Hege, "Märtyrersynode," Mennonitisches Lexikon, vol. 3, pp. 53-56.

Table 1
Anabaptist Mission Work

Name of Missionary	Known Number of Converts Baptized	Time of Baptism	Estimated Total	Time of Service
Jakob Gross	35	1 day		1525
Jörg Schad	40	March 12		1525
Wilhelm Roubli	60	1 day		1525
Balthasar Hubmaier	360	Easter	6,000	1525-28
Conrad Grebel	"a whole procession of men and women"			1525-26
Johannes Brötli	"nearly a whole village"			1525
Hans Bichter	30	March 8-15		1529
Martin Zehentmaier	40			1527
Leonard Dorfbrunner	about 100	few months	3,000	1525-29
Jörg Blaurock	1,000		4,000	1525-29
Hans Hut	about 100	2 weeks	12,000	1527-29
Georg Nespitzer	22	2 years	4,000	1527-29
Leonard Schiemer	over 200	6 months		1527
Michael Kurschner	about 100	11 months		1528-29
Jacob Huter	19	Aug. 1535		1533-35
Leenaert Bouwens	10,378	31 years		1551-82
Hans Mandl	about 400		4,000	1561

Hut, Jörg von Passau, Hetzer, Jakob Gross, Jakob Dachser, Sigmund Salminger, Eitelhans Langenmantel, Leonhard Dofbrunner, Gall Fischer--most of whom died as missionary martyrs within a few years. The fate of an Anabaptist missionary ("agitator" in Christendom) usually was sealed without adequate trial or hearing. But the answer of the heroes of the Restitution was the gallant testimony of the cup of blood. Persecution only changed them from wandering pilgrims to missionary strategists, ready when the time came to be martyrs also.¹¹⁴

Finally, Strassburg must be mentioned as another prominent mission center. The Swiss Brethren found here a more tolerant atmosphere than in their native land and formed one of the more stable groups in this area.¹¹⁵ The Anabaptists spread from here not only to other parts of southwestern Germany, but also north into Holland.

But the records also reveal that not all concerns of the Anabaptists were focused on mission. Strassburg was a special place for the great conferences where theological issues were discussed and rules of discipline and regulations of conduct hammered out.¹¹⁶ As early as 1568, a dress code was formulated here, stating "that tailors and seamstresses shall hold to the plain and simple custom and shall make nothing at all for pride's sake." The rule also stated that "brethren and sisters shall stay by the present form of our regulations concerning apparel and have nothing made for pride's sake."¹¹⁷

Here, then, we find the first indication of a shift from charismatic biblicism to rigid legalism and from mission to maintenance, a subject for the next chapter.

¹¹⁴ Littell, Anabaptist View of the Church, p. 122.

¹¹⁵ John Horsch, Mennonites in Europe, 2nd ed. (Scottdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1950), pp. 129-131.

¹¹⁶ Major conferences were held in Strassburg in 1555, 1557, 1558, 1568, 1592, and 1607. In view of the historical record it is hardly coincidental that the 11th Assembly of the Mennonite World Conference was held there in July 1984.

¹¹⁷ Horsch, Mennonites in Europe, p. 130.

Chapter 4

MISSION AND MAINTENANCE IN TENSION

Introduction

The forces of history rocked the cradle of the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement simultaneously in Switzerland, Germany, and Holland. Here the Stepchildren of the Reformation had been conceived in the atmosphere of social unrest and political ferment. Here they were born in the bosom of spiritual renewal and religious reform. Here they were also nurtured in a climate of ecclesiastical tensions and theological disputations. Under such circumstances they forged their ecclesiology of the Believers' Church in terms of both its missionary dimension and its missionary intention. They matured spiritually under the pressures of severe persecution and expanded missionarily by witnessing of God's love in Christ under the empowerment of the Holy Spirit throughout the continental lands.

While the first generations of the Stepchildren had viewed the whole earth and all its peoples as a mission field for evangelism, later generations expended their energies and resources primarily on themselves--their youth, their elderly, and their needy--through institutional services.¹ They gave little thought to cross frontiers towards the world in order to witness on the other side of those frontiers. There were exceptions, to be sure, but they were few in number. The missionary movement had given way to the institution, yet for the most part the tension between the two remained evident for many years. My objective in this chapter is to deal with that tension. In doing so I will (a) survey dispersions and divisions of Mennonites in Western Europe; (b) delineate their experience in Prussia; (c) trace the first migrations to Russia; (d) analyze the ethnoecclesiastical life of

¹ Christian Hege, Ein Rückblick auf 400 Jahre mennonitischer Geschichte (Karlsruhe: Heinrich Schneider, 1935), pp. 37-38.

institutional Mennonitism in Russia from 1789 to 1860; and (e) offer some critical reflections on the institutionalization process and its impact on the mission of the church.

Dispersions and Divisions

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the Anabaptist-Mennonites dispersed throughout the Continent, and beyond its boundaries after that. Most of them were forcefully uprooted. Some moved for socioeconomic reasons. Still others took to the road as pilgrim people for the purpose of mission.

The Swiss Mennonites

As one pages through the Ausbund,² the first Anabaptist-Mennonite hymnbook, published in 1564, one reads time and again a biographical note about the writer of the hymn, the occasion for writing it, and the date and manner of the author's execution. Such remarks as the following are common: Algerius: burned, 1557; Liepold Schneider: beheaded, 1528; Annelein von Freyburg: drowned and then burned, 1529; Jörg von Ingersheim: died in prison, n.d.; Michel Statlers (Sattler): torn to pieces with glowing tongs, tongue cut out, and then burned, 1527; Hans Has: hanged, 1527.³

Persecution of the Mennonites in Switzerland lasted well into the eighteenth century.⁴ Even the intercession by Dutch

² The original title of a reprint of the famous Ausbund reads: Auß Bund, das ist: etliche schöne Christenliche Lieder, wie die in der Gefängnuß zu Passau in dem Schloß von den Schweizer-Brüdern und andern rechtgläubigen Christen hin und her gedichtet worden (Basel: Jak. Heinr. von Mechel, 1838).

³ Ausbund, song nos. 5-23, 29-34, 36, 39, 59. The last song listed is reported by Samuel Henri Geiser, Die Taufgesinnten Gemeinden im Rahmen der allgemeinen Kirchengeschichte, 2nd rev. ed. (Porrentrey: Le Jura S.A., 1971), p. 370.

⁴ The last execution of a Mennonite in Switzerland occurred in 1671, but persecution persisted until 1799. Many Mennonites died in prison as a result of physical deprivation and torture. C. Henry Smith, Story of the Mennonites, 5th ed. rev. and enlarged by Cornelius Krahn (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1981), p. 75. This edition will be used for this

Mennonites for their brethren and a delegation sent by the government to Swiss authorities on behalf of the Mennonites there were of no avail.⁵ For nearly 300 years the councils of Zürich and Berne remained determined to exterminate the brotherhood-type congregations as undesirable elements within their cantons.⁶ Not before 1815 were the Mennonites finally granted religious freedom and rights of citizenship.⁷ In the meantime, thousands had found refuge in Holland, West Prussia, Romania, Poland, Germany, and America. Some Hutterites even migrated to Russia.⁸

What dampened the missionary spirit even more than persecution and dispersion were ecclesiastical divisions. Personal interests of certain individuals, rigid legalism of strong leaders, and ethnic differences between the groups were major destructive factors.

In 1693, elder Jakob Ammann⁹ (whence the Amish Mennonites) and other elders itinerated in Swiss congregations.

study, unless otherwise indicated. Geiser, Die Taufgesinnten, pp. 319, 356f., 403, 419f., 449f. Cornelius J. Dyck (ed.), An Introduction to Mennonite History (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1970), pp. 112-125; Thieleman J. Van Braght, Martyrs Mirror, trans. from the 1660 Dutch edition by Joseph F. Sohm (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1972), p. 1126.

⁵ Smith, Story, pp. 78-80, 91f. Van Braght, Martyrs Mirror, pp. 1109-1110. The documents of the Dutch authorities addressed to the Councils of Zürich and Berne appear in the Martyrs Mirror, pp. 1131-1135. Cf. "Mandates," pp. 1136-1139; also Geiser, Die Taufgesinnten, pp. 454-460.

⁶ Geiser, Die Taufgesinnten, pp. 417-418; Van Braght, Martyrs Mirror, pp. 1108-1109.

⁷ Smith, Story, p. 94.

⁸ Henry Smith, The Story of the Mennonites, 4th ed. rev. and enlarged by Cornelius Krahn (Newton, KS: Mennonite Publication Office, 1957), map, p. 114. Cf. Geiser, Die Taufgesinnten, pp. 436-438; Van Braght, Martyrs Mirror, pp. 1125-1126.

⁹ Christian Neff, "Amische Mennoniten" and "Amman, Jakob," Mennonitisches Lexikon, vols. 1-3 ed. by Christian Hege and Christian Neff (Frankfurt a.M. und Weierhof, 1913, 1916, 1938); vol. 4 ed. by Harold S. Bender and Ernst Crous (Karlsruhe: Heinrich Schneider, 1959), vol. 1, pp. 56-57; Geiser, Die Taufgesinnten, p. 445.

Their overriding concern was laxness among believers, particularly with respect to church discipline. Ammann demanded that the Meidung (shunning) or ban be applied according to the letter. This included total avoidance of a marriage partner under discipline and the refusal even of family to eat with a church member.

The teaching of shunning came from Menno Simons.¹⁰ However his love for the church¹¹ and concern for its purity¹² had tempered his application of the ban. Not so for Ammann. He adhered to the letter of the law and refused to apply the principle of love which had been evident in Simon's pastoral eldership.

When elder Hans Riest objected to Ammann's harsh procedures, he and his supporters were single-handedly excommunicated. All attempts by Mennonite leaders in Holland, Elsass-Lorraine, and North Germany to reconcile the factions proved fruitless.¹³ The literal form became more important than the biblical norm. Most significant for Ammann was the dress code. He insisted on the use of the Häftli (hooks) and the Rickli (eyes) instead of buttons. Even pockets were considered worldly.¹⁴

¹⁰ Menno Simons, The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, trans. from the Dutch by Leonard Verduin and ed. by John C. Wenger, with a biography by Harold S. Bender (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1956). Simons' most important tracts on church discipline are: "A Kind Admonition on Church Discipline" (1541), pp. 407-418; "Reply to Gellius Faber" (1554), especially the section on "Excommunication, Ban, Expulsion," pp. 723-734; "Instruction on Excommunication" (1558), pp. 959-998; "Instruction on Discipline to the Church at Franeker" (1555) and at Emden (1556), pp. 1043-1045, 1050-1051; "Final Instruction on Marital Avoidance" (1558), pp. 1060-1063.

¹¹ Simons, Complete Writings, p. 1055.

¹² Simons, Complete Writings, pp. 1043-1045.

¹³ Geiser, Die Taufgesinnten, pp. 446-448; Neff, "Ammann," p. 57; Smith, Story, pp. 84-85.

¹⁴ The proverbial saying of the time implied salvific merits: "Die mit Hacken und Oesen wird der Herr erlösen, die mit Knöpfen und Taschen wird der Teufel erhaschen." Quoted by Geiser, Die Taufgesinnten, p. 448.

Sins were defined by the leadership. Criteria were set by the opinions of the second generation rather than by Scripture. What Walter Freytag (1896-1959) has referred to as problems of the second generation fits the picture of the Swiss Mennonites who were pious, theologically orthodox, and ethically legalistic.¹⁵ As a result, internal divisions over peripheral matters exhausted all energies at the expense of mission. Self-preservation became the rule of the game for more than 200 years. The church dulled its cutting edge because it lost contact with the world.

The Mennonites had withdrawn into a shell and lived in isolation to the detriment of mission. Eventually, however, the shell was broken and light shone in from the outside. The evangelistic and missionary writings of Johannes Evangelista Goßner (1772-1854) as well as of men of the Innere Mission, founded by Johann-Hinrich Wichern (1806-1881), knocked gently but persistently on the door of Swiss Mennonites. When they finally unlocked the door from the inside, they began to see the world with new eyes and with new ears they heard the call to mission, both at home and overseas.¹⁶

Mennonites in the Netherlands

Nowhere have Mennonites been more ruthlessly exterminated than in the Netherlands between 1531 and 1597.¹⁷ For more than two generations the Spanish Inquisition had proved so

¹⁵ Walter Freytag, Reden und Aufsätze, 2 vols., eds. Jan Hermeling and Hans-Jochen Margull (München: Christian Kaiser, 1961). Of special significance is "Das Problem der zweiten Generation in der Jungen Kirche," vol. 1, pp. 245-257; cf. Hans Kasdorf, Christian Conversion in Context (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1980), pp. 143-166.

¹⁶ Geiser, Die Taufgesinnten, pp. 572-573. Cf. Walter Holsten, Johannes Evangelista Goßner: Glaube und Gemeinde (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1949), pp. 5-31; J. H. Wichern, Die innere Mission der deutschen evangelischen Kirche (Hamburg: Agentur des Rauhen Hauses, 1948), pp. 28ff., 157ff.

¹⁷ Van Braght, Martyrs Mirror, pp. 440ff., 1098-1100.

successful that "the Mennonites were practically rooted out by 1600."¹⁸ But there were other problems.

Ethnic divisions. Persecution failed to purify human nature. Mennonites found reasons to split hair over minor details of religious belief and conduct which at times amounted to "hardly more than the cut of a coat or the ceremonial manner of washing feet."¹⁹ This spirit of divisiveness was reinforced by ethnic and tribal rivalry. Most serious were the divisions between the Frisians and the Flemish in Friesland.²⁰ The Waterlanders by the Zuider Zee north of Amsterdam were yet of another tribe. Each group enforced endogamous marriages on their young. Such practice had ethnic and historical rather than ethical or theological bases. Those who either married outside the tribe or inter-married with any other branch of Mennonites were promptly excommunicated.²¹

The Frisians were natives of their northern province, the Flemish refugees were from Flanders in the south. They not only spoke different languages, had gone through

¹⁸ Smith, Story, p. 105.

¹⁹ Smith, Story, p. 109.

²⁰ History of mission records the aggressive nature of the Frisians who in 754 coldbloodedly killed the British missionary Wynfrith (Boniface) and his twenty-four younger companions who had come to evangelize Friesland. Cf. J. A. van Rooy, "Christ and the Religions: The Issues at Stake," Missionalia, 13, No. 1 (April 1985), 3-13. The coarse Frisian temperament has not always been subdued in the history of the Menno tribes. The schism of 1812 between the "Kleine Gemeinde" and the "Grosse Gemeinde" in Russia was part of the Frisian/Flemish rivalry. Cf. the documents recorded by Franz Isaac, Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten (Halbstadt, Taurien: H. J. Braun, 1908), pp. 95-114.

²¹ Smith, Story, pp. 110-111. The historian P. M. Friesen records an incident of excommunication of a Flemish man who had married a Frisian woman. Soon his wife died and he wanted to marry a Flemish woman from his original congregation. But only upon "confession of guilt" was he reinstated and allowed to marry. Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), trans. and ed. by J. B. Toews et al. (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), p. 61.

different sociopolitical experiences, and lived by different sets of cultural standards and social mores: they simply were two different peoples with different worldviews. Their only common denominator was their new-found faith as followers of Menno Simons. But their understanding as to how the Christian life was to be expressed in daily practice was as different as the culture of Friesland was from the culture of Flanders. On the one hand, the easygoing Flemish could not submit to the rigidity of autocratic leadership exercised by Frisian elders. The Frisians, on the other hand, found the aesthetic tastes for finer apparel, the cosmetic forms of appearance, and the democratic spirit in church matters of the Flemish unacceptable. Because integration was difficult, the Flemish formed their own congregations on Frisian soil and became an exclusive element of Mennonitism. The two factions remained ethnically separated--particularly in Prussia--for more than 200 years.²²

Theological formulations. Ethnic divisions were soon overshadowed by creedal formulations intended to preserve the faith of the fathers.²³ The Waterlanders published their

²² Smith, Story, p. 110. The ethnic tension between the Frisian and the Flemish could make an interesting historical case study for missiologists who base their theory of church growth on the so-called "homogeneous unit principle." It is my conviction that traces of the same type of tribal rivalry so dominant among early Mennonites in Holland have surfaced in Russia (1789f.), later in Canada, and again in Paraguay in our century. The controversial nature of the homogeneous unit principle is well known in missiological circles. I refer here to only a few selected discussions of a much debated issue. Donald A. McGavran, Understanding Church Growth, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); C. Peter Wagner, Church Growth and the Whole Gospel (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981); Harvey M. Conn, ed., Theological Perspectives on Church Growth (Nutley: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976); Elmer L. Towns et al., The Complete Book of Church Growth (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1981); Wilbert R. Shenk, ed., Exploring Church Growth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

²³ A. J. Klassen has reconstructed a complete list of all the early Mennonite confessions of faith in one of his master's theses, "The Roots and Development of Mennonite Brethren Theology to 1914," Wheaton College Graduate School, Wheaton, IL, 1966. This is the most useful document for systematic study of the Confessions.

first Confession in 1577.²⁴ Under the leadership of Hans de Ries (1553-1638), they made several revisions and adaptations. The Flemish drafted the famous Dordrecht Confession in 1632, and in 1660 the joint Flemish-Frisian Confession took shape. The last two creedal statements had a lasting impact on later Mennonite groups, including the Mennonite Brethren in Russia.²⁵

Leadership conflict. Dutch Mennonite leaders were more educated, enculturated, and sophisticated than those of any other Anabaptist group of the time. That created tensions. The first major conflict causing separation within the Mennonites occurred in the 1650s within the Flemish congregation at the Lamb (hence Lammists) near Amsterdam. The issue was related to soteriology. The question was whether repentance from sin, the new birth, and a personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior were a prerequisite to live obediently under the Lordship of Christ, as the early Anabaptists had maintained; whether it was sufficient to apply ethical principles and good habits to everyday life without those conditions.

Ironically, the issue gave rise to the so-called Lammerenkrijgh, war of the Lambs, within the congregations, particularly the Waterlanders. Each side gravitated to a strong leader, and by 1664 the split was final. Samuel Apostool (1638-1699),²⁶ a medical doctor and trained theologian, left the Lamb congregation. About 600 members in agreement with his conservative theological position followed him. They formed the Sonnisten,²⁷ so called because they carved a symbol of the rising sun on the gable of their

²⁴ Cornelius J. Dyck, "The First Waterlandian Confession of Faith," Mennonite Quarterly Review 36 (1962), 5-13.

²⁵ Klassen, "Roots and Development," pp. 67-68.

²⁶ H. van der Smissen, "Apostool, Samuel," Mennonitisches Lexikon, vol. 1, p. 79.

²⁷ N. von der Zijpp, "Zonists" (Sonnisten; Zonnisten), Mennonite Encyclopedia, 4 vols., ed. Harold S. Bender et al. (Scottsdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1955-1959), vol. 4, pp. 1038-1039; Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 33.

house of worship. Galenus Abrahamsz de Haan (1622-1706),²⁸ also a medical doctor, trained theologian, and ordained pastor, stayed with the more liberal Lammisten.²⁹ Each group gained a substantial following from other congregations in the area.

Apostool and his group organized the Society of the Sonnists in 1674, based on the Oprecht Verbondt van Eenigheyt (Sincere Covenant of Unity), drawn up by the Waterlanders near Amsterdam and the more evangelical elements of both Frisian and Flemish congregations. Interestingly, de Haan's group took a similar course of action. In 1675,³⁰ the same year in which Philip Jakob Spener (1635-1705) wrote his Pia Desideria, they founded the Society of the Lammists under the motto, Vrijheid van spreken en onbepaalde Verdraagzaamheid (Freedom of Speech and Unrestricted Tolerance).³¹

The intellectual and secular atmosphere of prominent philosophers and scientists shaped de Haan's thinking.³² He was quite sympathetic to the ideas of his contemporary Descartes, who promoted "the right and necessity of doubt as beginning and basis for all true knowledge."³³ His personal

²⁸ H. W. Meihuizen, Galenus Abrahamsz 1622-1706 (Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink and Zoon N.V., 1954).

²⁹ N. van der Zijpp, "Lamm-Gemeinde in Amsterdam," "Lammerenkrijgh," and Lammisten," Mennonitisches Lexikon, vol. 2, p. 606; S. Cramer, "Mennoniten," Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche, ed. Albert Hauck, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1903), vol. 12, pp. 609-611.

³⁰ C. B. Hylkema gives 1675, "Galenus Abrahamsz de Haan," Mennonitisches Lexikon, vol. 2, p. 28, whereas H. W. Meihuizen cites 1674 as the founding date of the Society of the Lammists, Mennonite Encyclopedia, vol. 2, p. 433; cf. Dyck, Introduction, pp. 116-118; Smith, Story, pp. 110-115.

³¹ Hylkema, "Galenus," p. 27.

³² de Haan was in touch with the development of science and philosophy of his day, including the writings and achievements of men like Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), Rene Descartes (1596-1650), John Locke (1632-1704), Isaac Newton (1642-1717), Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz (1646-1716) and Blaise Pascal (1632-1662).

³³ Hylkema, "Galenus," p. 27.

openness to the Zeitgeist and the tolerant attitude of the Lammists in general brought the Mennonites in contact with the Pietists of continental Europe and the Socinians (Antitrinitarian Anabaptists) of Poland. These contacts opened the floodgates for German Rationalism among Dutch Mennonites.³⁴

Cycles of growth and decline. Like the Swiss Anabaptists, the Mennonites in the Netherlands dispersed widely through persecution and emigration, reducing their number on home soil to a mere trickle by the end of the sixteenth century. But the first two generations maintained their missionary dimension and remained a relatively strong centrifugal missionary force wherever they moved. Even internal divisions did not seem to stifle growth during the early years. In the course of time smaller numbers from all factions--especially the Frisians and the Flemish--gravitated to daughter settlements in North Germany, Danzig, and the Vistula Delta in Prussia.³⁵

While the first two or three generations of the sixteenth century had experienced decline due to emigration and extermination, those of the seventeenth century saw a quantitative upsurge and growth. For at least three generations (1597-1700) they enjoyed religious freedom, social privileges, economic affluence, and a numerical increase to a membership of about 160,000. But their growth was more biological and centripetal in nature than the result of intentional missionary outreach.

The seventeenth century was what historians have called "The Golden Age" for Mennonites in Holland.³⁶ Corrosive elements, however, were deposited and did not leave the gold untarnished within the younger generation. A century of growth was followed by a century of decline. During the 1700s,

³⁴ Cramer, "Mennoniten," pp. 610-611; Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 31-35.

³⁵ Smith, Story, p. 112.

³⁶ Smith, Story, pp. 115-130.

the Mennonites experienced almost total disintegration. They forgot the woes of their past and lived for the wealth of the present. Church discipline became lax, Christian ordinances lost their meaning, the missionary life of the church was exchanged for compromise with the world, and such biblical principles as peace witness and nonresistance were flatly rejected. Mennonite tradesmen and merchants equipped their ships with heavy weapons on international waters. When the government withdrew the privilege of nonresistance in 1799, Mennonites voiced little objection. In the course of 108 years or three generations, about 100 Mennonite congregations had become extinct, wiped off the map. Many members had joined the Reformed Church where they found spiritual stimulation and nurture, since their own pastors had been trained in the intellectual climate of higher biblical criticism of the Enlightenment and German Rationalism. Small wonder that the total Mennonite membership in the Netherlands decreased from 160,000 in 1700 to a mere 26,953 in 1808.³⁷

But even within the declining institution a small remnant carried out its perceived calling through its own diaconate. Social services were high on the list. Evangelistic work began to emerge only in the middle of the nineteenth century with the founding of the Dutch Mennonite Mission Society in 1847. This Society commissioned Pieter Jansz (1820-1904) as its first missionary to Java in 1851. Prior to that time some Dutch Mennonites had lent limited support to the mission of the Moravian Brethren of Herrnhut, the Basel Mission, and the Berlin Mission.³⁸

³⁷ Dyck, Introduction, p. 118. Cf. J. Van den Berg, "Die pluralistische Gestalt des kirchlichen Lebens in den Niederlanden 1574-1974," in Pietismus und Reveil, eds. J. Van den Berg and J. P. Van Dooren (Leiden: Brill, 1978), pp. 5-6, 11-13.

³⁸ Geiser, Die Taufgesinnten, p. 573; Christian Neff, "Diakonisse," Mennonitisches Lexikon, vol. 1, pp. 434-438; Christian Hege, "Missionsfelder," Mennonitisches Lexikon, vol. 3, pp. 141-142.

Mennonites in Germany

By the end of the sixteenth century Mennonites had been driven to virtually every corner of Europe, wherever benevolent authorities allowed them to settle, even if only for a short time. The Lower Rhine Valley, East Friesland, Hamburg-Altona, Schleswig-Holstein, and the Danzig-Elbing districts became important Mennonite settlements. Here the Mennonites lived for many decades prior to the great exodus to Russia in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

In the Rhine Valley. A cluster of congregations took root here with Krefeld at the center.³⁹ The first church had been established by Hermann op den Graeff (1585-1642)⁴⁰ in the early part of the seventeenth century. Graeff maintained close ties with the Flemish Mennonites in Holland and signed the Dordrecht Confession in 1632. The members were prosperous, culturally progressive, and religiously tolerant.⁴¹ Like their Flemish brethren in the Netherlands, they internalized their faith and ordered their religious life around edifying conventicles of the Stillen im Lande, "quiet in the land." Their spiritual nurture came from Quakers, Pietists, Separatists, Labadists, Puritans, and Moravian Brethren.⁴² The most influential outsiders were William Penn (1644-1769), a Quaker,⁴³ and Gerhard Tersteegen (1697-1769), a Reformed

³⁹ Dirk Cattepoel, "Das Religiöse Leben in der krefelder Mennonitengemeinde des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts," in Beiträge zur Geschichte der rheinischen Mennoniten, ed. Kurt von Beckerath (Weierhof, Pfalz: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1939), pp. 5-28.

⁴⁰ Christian Hege, "Graff, Hermann op den," Mennonitisches Lexikon, vol. 2, pp. 153-154.

⁴¹ While most of the Krefeld Mennonites were linen weavers, some specialized in silk. The von der Leyen family became world famous for its fine silks. At one time the company employed over 3,000 workers. In 1751 and 1763 Frederick the Great visited there and presented the family with an oil painting of himself. Dyck, Introduction, pp. 118-119.

⁴² Cattepoel, "Das religiöse Leben," p. 7.

⁴³ Robert C. Newman, "Penn, William," The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. J. D. Douglas, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), pp. 762-763.

Pietist.⁴⁴ Both men visited freely in Mennonite homes and preached in their churches.

Penn recruited thirteen Mennonite families as part of the core of his "holy experiment" of colonization. They became the founding fathers of Germantown in Pennsylvania in 1683, the first German settlement--although not the first Mennonites--on the North American continent.⁴⁵ It is of interest that two Graeff brothers from Krefeld, Abram and Dirk, were among the four signatories to sign the first protest against slavery in America.⁴⁶

Like most of his Mennonite friends, Tersteegen was a weaver by profession. But after his spiritual conversion through Pietistic influences he gave up weaving, devoted time to writing, withdrew from the public, and dedicated himself as leader of the Erbauungsstunden patterned after the collegiants in Holland. His cottage became known as the "Pilgerhütte, a retreat for the Stillen im Lande."⁴⁷

The Mennonites liked this lay preacher of Reformed Pietism and frequently invited him to speak to their congregations. Tersteegen reports of preaching there one

⁴⁴ John S. Andrews, "Tersteegen, Gerhard," The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, ed. J. D. Douglas, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), p. 960. Cf. Erich Beyreuther, "Pietismus," Evangelisches Gemeindelexikon, eds. Erich Gelbach, Helmut Burkhardt, and Kurt Heimbucher (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1978), pp. 412-413.

⁴⁵ Dyck, Introduction, p. 119; Smith, Story, pp. 161-162. J. J. Hildebrand reports in his Zeittafel that a French Jesuit tells of a missionary journey to America in 1643 on which he had met Calvinists, Lutherans, Catholics, Puritans, and Anabaptists who were called Menisten, an early Dutch designation for Mennonites. Chronologische Zeittafel: 1500 Daten historischer Ereignisse und Geschehnisse aus der Zeit der Mennoniten Westeuropas, Rußlands und Amerikas (North Kildonan, Winnipeg: H. Regehr, 1945), p. 90.

⁴⁶ Christian Hege, "Graff," Mennonitisches Lexikon, vol. 2, p. 154.

⁴⁷ Andrews, "Tersteegen," p. 960; Ed. Simons, "Tersteegen, Gerhard," Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche, ed. Albert Hauch, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: J. D. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1907), vol. 19, pp. 530-537.

Wednesday morning when the church was gepfropt voll (filled to capacity).⁴⁸

The ecumenical spirit of the Krefeld Mennonites kept them from internal divisions; however, their choice to align with the "quiet in the land" barred them from being a missionizing people in the world.

In northerñ Germany. The tolerant spirit of the Mennonites on the Lower Rhine was magnified among their kinfolk to the north where Rationalism had made its impact on all congregations. Although the Frisian and Flemish immigrants had for many decades upheld their unique application of church discipline, the gap between the two tribes eventually narrowed. In time the two groups integrated with the native German Mennonites, their goal being nothing short of total fusion. A typical example of their rhetoric is found in the writings of the influential Gerrit Roosen (1612-1711), who at age ninety published the famous catechism for church membership classes.⁴⁹ It was widely used, put through many editions, and translated into English. One historian notes:

The tenor of this catechism, as of his other writings, was one of accommodation, . . . it being Roosen's concern to make Mennonitism appear harmless and as nearly like other Protestant groups as possible. One might describe his catechism as Mennonitism in a minor key.⁵⁰

Both the Krefeld and North German Mennonites give evidence that the Mennonite movement was no longer a church in mission with event-character. Mennonitism here had become an institution with theologizing traits and without mission.

In southern Germany. Here the situation was much like that in Switzerland. In the Habsburg Crown Lands (the

⁴⁸ Cattepoel, "Das religiöse Leben," p. 17.

⁴⁹ For 300 years the Mennonite Roosen family provided strong leadership well into the twentieth century. Mennonitisches Lexikon, vol. 3, pp. 531-537.

⁵⁰ Dyck, Introduction, pp. 122-123.

Austrias, Carniola, Carinthia, Salzburg, and Tyrol) as well as in Bavaria, authorities were determined to exterminate every Mennonite. Early missionaries were on the most-wanted list. The Innsbruck Edict of 1540 promised "one hundred gulden for the delivery of a Mennonite minister if alive; fifty if dead; and ten for an ordinary member."⁵¹

Conditions in the Palatinate were similar. The death penalty for heresy was upheld throughout the sixteenth century. Severe oppression lasted several decades beyond the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Unlike the Mennonites in Northern Germany, those in the South were predominantly farmers, craftsmen, and artisans. They had come there by invitation. Karl Ludwig (1643-1715) of France was so impressed with their skills and industry that he invited them to the Palatinate to repeople his deserted lands, rebuild his demolished cities, and reform his devastated farms which had been in ruins since the Thirty Years War. He issued a limited act of toleration in 1664, allowing the Mennonites freedom of worship in private but not in public meetings. This religio tolerata was more than they had ever had.⁵² But the price they paid was high. By promising to refrain from mission work among members of the German state church,⁵³ they, too, became the Stillen im Lande for generations to come--whether they stayed in Europe or emigrated to America.

Mennonite Experience in Prussia

Dutch Mennonites were the first to settle between Danzig in the west and Elbing in the east along the Baltic coast,

⁵¹ Smith, Story, p. 189.

⁵² Christian Hege, Die Täufer in der Kurpfalz: Ein Beitrag zur badischpfälzischen Reformationgeschichte (Frankfurt a.M.: Kommissionsverlag von Hermann Monjon, 1908), p. 178; Hildebrand, Zeittafel, p. 97.

⁵³ Smith, Story, pp. 196-198; Hildebrand, Zeittafel, pp. 97-98.

and from there south to Thorn along the Vistula River.⁵⁴ Smaller Austrian, South German, and Swiss groups merged with the larger Frisian and Flemish contingents from the Netherlands to form congregations in Prussia.⁵⁵

Poverty and Oppression

Three major waves of Mennonite refugees can be identified:

1. The persecution that was unleashed after the tragedy of Münster in 1535 put large groups of Anabaptists on the road.

2. The brutal inquisitorial reign of Duke Alva (1567-1573) set a second wave of emigrants in motion.⁵⁶

3. During the Counter Reformation a third wave moved from the south along the Vistula River and settled in its northern delta.⁵⁷ For the first time in over 200 years these heretofore uninhabitable swampy deserts became, under both Polish and Prussian rule, a haven of refuge for undesirable, persecuted, and oppressed Mennonites.

At first refugees experienced considerable harrassment from Polish authorities in West Prussia, but after 1600 conditions improved considerably, though not consistently.⁵⁸ By and large they were tolerated and respected, and after 1627 sporadically protected.⁵⁹ One of the reasons for

⁵⁴ Horst Penner, Weltweite Bruderschaft: Ein mennonitisches Geschichtsbuch (Karlsruhe: Heinrich Schneider, 1960), map, p. 73. One of the earliest records of Mennonites in Prussia is by Freiherr von Reiswitz and Professor Wadzeck, Beiträge zur Kenntnis der Mennoniten-Gemeinden in Europa und Amerika, statistischen, historischen und religiösen Inhalts (Berlin: Verlag der Redaction, 1821), p. 17f.

⁵⁵ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 47; P. Sommer, "Ludwig XIV," Mennonitisches Lexikon, vol. 2, pp. 697-699; Penner, Weltweite Bruderschaft, p. 70.

⁵⁶ Frederick A. Norwood, Strangers and Exiles: A History of Religious Refugees (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969), vol. 1, p. 257; Penner, Weltweite Bruderschaft, p. 90.

⁵⁷ Penner, Weltweite Bruderschaft, p. 70.

⁵⁸ Reiswitz and Wadzeck, Beiträge, p. 25ff.

⁵⁹ Reiswitz and Wadzeck, Beiträge, pp. 32-38.

tolerance on the part of the authorities was purely utilitarian. Like their brethren in South Germany, these Mennonites from Holland knew how to drain the swamps and turn erstwhile useless wastelands into useful pastures and profitable wheat farms, though not without high cost of life and health unto themselves. It is reported that 80 percent of the first generation settlers perished from a deadly swamp fever.⁶⁰

Prosperity and Toleration

Under the Protestant monarchy of the German Hohenzollern conditions continued to improve. Frederick I was king of Prussia from 1701 to 1713. In 1710 he did his utmost to attract Mennonites to settle on his deserted lands depopulated by the plague of the seventeenth century. Though he was unsuccessful at first,⁶¹ a number of Swiss Mennonites did settle in Lithuania in 1711. Frederick granted them religious freedom and guaranteed complete military exemption.⁶²

His successor, Frederick William I (1713-1740), was less tolerant. This arrogant Soldatenkönig (soldier-king) had a compulsive predilection for big and strong youths.⁶³ When he saw the six-foot tall, healthy, handsome Mennonite boys working the fields or walking the streets he could not resist having the große Kerls enlisted in his Potsdamer Garde. Refusal to obey resulted in serious conflicts between government and Mennonites. The king was so incensed by resistance to military service that in 1732 he issued an edict demanding that all Mennonites leave the country within three months. But because of their unusual achievements in agriculture,

⁶⁰ Dyck, Introduction, p. 123; John Horsch, Mennonites in Europe, 2nd ed. (Scottsdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1950), p. 230; Penner, Weltweite Bruderschaft, p. 72.

⁶¹ William I. Schreiber, The Fate of Prussian Mennonites (Goettingen: The Goettingen Research Committee, 1955), p. 21.

⁶² H. G. Mannhardt, "Friedrich I, König von Preussen," Mennonitisches Lexikon, vol. 2, p. 1; Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 49; Reiswitz and Wadzeck, Beiträge, pp. 32-33.

⁶³ Schreiber, Prussian Mennonites, p. 25.

industry, and commerce, the edict was not enforced.⁶⁴ Four years earlier he had given the Mennonites the unprecedented privilege of erecting their own church buildings for unrestricted use, a promise he honored to the end of his reign.⁶⁵

During the long and firm reign of Frederick II, known as "the Great" (1740-1786), the Mennonites again experienced a great deal of freedom. This benevolent monarch annulled the 1732 edict of his father and instead declared "that those Mennonites, who want to settle in Königsberg and other locations of East Prussia, should everywhere be accepted."⁶⁶ This declaration not only extended to Mennonites already living in East and West Prussia, but also contained an invitation to those in Holland and elsewhere to seek residence in his domain.⁶⁷ Economically, Mennonites in Prussia became both prosperous and famous. Their delicate Tilsit cheese, their unusually fine linens and laces, and their Goldwasser (goldwater) such as the Danziger Lachs distilled the "Danzig Way," and other spirited beers and wines gained fame on world markets.⁶⁸ A generational proverb tells the story in metaphoric language:

Die erste Generation
hatte den Tod,
die zweite die Not,
die dritte das Brot.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Mannhardt, "Friedrich I," p. 3; M. Klaassen, Geschichte der wehrlosen taufgesinnten Gemeinden von den Zeiten der Apostel bis auf die Gegenwart (Danzig: Edwin Groening, 1873), pp. 242-243; Schreiber, Prussian Mennonites, pp. 24-25.

⁶⁵ Schreiber, Prussian Mennonites, p. 24.

⁶⁶ H. G. Mannhardt, "Friedrich II, der Grosse, König von Preussen," Mennonitisches Lexikon, vol. 2, pp. 1-2; Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 49-50.

⁶⁷ Mannhardt, "Friedrich II," p. 2.

⁶⁸ Penner, Weltweite Bruderschaft, p. 74; Smith, Story, p. 167; Schreiber, Prussian Mennonites, p. 21.

⁶⁹ Penner, Weltweite Bruderschaft, p. 72.

Tribalism and Conflict

The Dutch element in West Prussia remained strong despite attempts at integration. Some congregations conducted worship services in their native languages and ordered the entire church life in traditional fashion well into the middle of the eighteenth century.⁷⁰ The Frisian and Flemish rivalries lasted even longer.⁷¹ While the Flemish were orthodox in theology, they were liberal in worldly practices, exclusive in relationship to other Christians, and minimally scrupulous in business ethics. In contrast, the Frisians were less rigid in their theology, but more brotherly toward other believers; they demonstrated genuine piety in daily living and were open to cultural and ecclesiastical progress.⁷²

Except for some traditional distinctives, Mennonites as a whole became this-worldly. One wonders in how far the fame of their spirited waters which they distilled in great quantities for the world market may have drowned out the flame of the Holy Spirit so essential for world mission and revival. Of these last there was no trace. By and large the Prussian congregations of Dutch descent "never experienced a spring of renewed life, nor a rich harvest; repeated schisms had left them weakened and incapacitated."⁷³

Brenkenhofswalde's Uniqueness

Around 1540, the Old Flemish Anabaptists found refuge in Przechovka, an estate of a Polish lord along the Vistula

⁷⁰ Horsch, Mennonites in Europe, p. 230.

⁷¹ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 50-51.

⁷² Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 53; cf. A. Braun, "Die kirchlichen Spaltungen in den rußlanddeutschen Mennoniten-Gemeinden," in Beiträge zur Geschichte der Mennoniten: Festgabe für D. Christian Neff zum 70. Geburtstag (Weiherhof, Pfalz: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1938), p. 7ff.

⁷³ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 34.

River of West Prussia.⁷⁴ After living there for more than 200 years, they were driven from their homes by Polish landlords.

In 1764, the entire congregation of thirty-two families accepted an invitation from Frederick the Great to colonize and drain his marshlands by the Neumark of Brandenburg, the very heart of the Hohenzollern state.⁷⁵ Here they settled on the estate of Franz von Brenkenhofswalde, not far from the famous Francke Foundations in Halle to the south and even closer to Zinzendorf's Brüdergemeinde of Herrnhut slightly to the southeast. Frederick granted them extraordinary privileges to establish the twin communities of Brenkenhofswalde/Franztal and to build their own church.⁷⁶

Brenkenhofswalde was an unusual congregation. Several factors helped to make it unique within the larger community of Mennonite congregations of the time. For one thing, there was an atmosphere of religious tolerance and interconfessional ecumenism. The old territorial principle of cuius regio, eius religio established at the Peace of Augsburg in 1555⁷⁷ had become both a convenient and powerful tool to manipulate people at the whims of the ruler. Elector Frederick III of Brandenburg crowned Frederick I, King of Prussia, in 1701, carried that principle beyond confessional ecclesiasticism and established interconfessional Protestantism. Despite vigorous protests from Orthodox Lutheran pastors, Frederick invited the Pietist Spener to

⁷⁴ H. G. Mannhardt, "Brenkenhofswalde und Franztal," Mennonitisches Lexikon, vol. 1, p. 263; Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 97-98.

⁷⁵ Friesen mentions thirty-two families in the group, Brotherhood, p. 49, while H. G. Mannhardt states that there were thirty-five families. "Brenkenhofswalde und Franztal," Mennonitisches Lexikon, vol. 1, p. 263; Horst Quiring, "Die Auswanderung der Mennoniten aus Preußen," Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter, Neue Folge 11, No. 6 (1954), 42.

⁷⁶ Brenkenhofswalde built its church in 1778 and Franztal in 1787. Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 98; Mannhardt, "Brenkenhofswalde und Franztal," p. 263.

⁷⁷ Kurt Dietrich Schmidt, Kirchengeschichte, 7th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1960), p. 350.

assume the pastorate of the St. Nickolas Church in Berlin in 1691. The following year he became Francke's benevolent protector and supporter in Glaucha near Halle.⁷⁸ Religious prejudices were rapidly reduced and confessional barriers broken down. "All religions must be tolerated," declared Frederick the Great in 1740, and "each person must be saved according to his own confession."⁷⁹

Such spirit of acceptance affected the Brenkenhofswalde Mennonites in no small measure. They were tolerated by others and tolerant of others. But they were also open to a renewing of mind and spirit. Under these circumstances such prominent Lutheran families as the Langes and the Langemanns, the Dirkses and the Lenzmanns secured permission to join the Mennonites.⁸⁰ The school teacher Wilhelm Lange (1765-1841), became a Mennonite in 1788. In 1802 he was ordained as preacher and eight years later elected elder of Brenkenhofswalde. The cultural and spiritual contributions of these first generation Mennonites can hardly be over-estimated.

Furthermore, Brenkenhofswalde had unusually capable leadership. In its early history there were men like Ernst Voot (Voodt; Voth),⁸¹ and Peter Jantz and later Wilhelm Lange. These were men with vision and direction. P. M. Friesen says of Lange that he was "as pious as he was intelligent and eloquent." It was no surprise that "scores of people from other faiths thronged to hear him speak."⁸²

Moreover, the Brenkenhofswalde members were strongly influenced by Lutheran and Moravian Pietism. Countless

⁷⁸ Ernest F. Stoeffler, German Pietism During the Eigheenth Century (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), p. 39.

⁷⁹ Karl Heussi, Kompendium der Kirchengeschichte, 14th ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1976), pp. 401-402.

⁸⁰ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 98-99.

⁸¹ It is believed, but not absolutely verified, that Tobias Voth was a direct descendant of Elder Ernst Voot. Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 991, note 19.

⁸² Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 99.

streams of renewal brought new blood into their veins and spiritual vitality to their life. This was evident in the way they worshiped, studied the Bible, and gave support to mission.⁸³

Finally, there was a sense of solidarity and brotherhood. In time of oppression the church stood together as one body. Together they had moved from Schwetzwitz to Brandenburg in 1764, and together they moved again to Russia in 1834. Elder Lange successfully negotiated with Czar Nicholas I for permission to emigrate to Russia. There Brenkenhofswalde became Gnadenfeld in 1835, and Gnadenfeld became the spiritual embryo out of which was born the Mennonite Brethren Church in 1860.⁸⁴ Without Brenkenhofswalde there could have been no Gnadenfeld, and without Gnadenfeld, the Mennonite Brethren Church would have been unthinkable.

Migration to South Russia

Historical and political events in Prussia caused rising anxiety among Mennonites.⁸⁵ When Frederick the Great assumed full control over Prussia in 1772, they came under his domain. With increased freedom grew a vision for economic expansion. But current laws limited land acquisition. It became apparent that existing conditions would not allow them to realize their potential for either cultural progress or agricultural and economic development. Their settlements were already overpopulated. In addition, Mennonites had to submit to a taxation census (1773) and pay heavy conscription fees as compensation for military exemption.⁸⁶

⁸³ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 98-99.

⁸⁴ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 99; cf. pp. 43, 53, 169, and Penner, Weltweite Bruderschaft, p. 77.

⁸⁵ Quiring, "Die Auswanderung," pp. 37-43.

⁸⁶ Klaassen, Geschichte, pp. 245-251; Hildebrand, Zeittafel, p. 134.

To Move or Not to Move

Under renewed pressures the Mennonites remembered hearing of a Manifesto which Empress Catherine the Great of Russia (1762-1796), had issued in 1762 and 1763. The appeal was for foreign farmers to settle her vast territories in the Ukraine.⁸⁷

During the Seven-Year War (1756-1763) between Russia and Turkey, the Russian army had quartered in Mennonite villages of West Prussia. Officers were amazed at how the Mennonites had literally transformed swampy wastelands into a fruitful paradise. Some time later, one of them suggested to his superiors that they should bring those peaceful and nonresistant Kultursoldaten (culture-soldiers) from Prussia to Southern Russia to cultivate the newly-gained territory, including the Crimea Peninsula by the Black Sea. These words were good news to Catherine the Great. She issued the famous Gnadenprivilegium (Charter of Privileges), promising religious freedom, military exemption, a substantial piece of land for each family, and much more.⁸⁸

After the death of Frederick the Great in 1786, the situation in Prussia reverted to a fourfold oppression and exploitation: (a) the Mennonites had to pay increased military taxes; (b) they were forbidden to accept any new members into their congregations, except by special permission; (c) children of mixed marriages had to be brought up in the ways of the non-Mennonite partner, which meant that they were no longer eligible for military exemption; and (d) acquisition of land was first made difficult, then forbidden, and, finally, steps were taken

⁸⁷ Hildebrand quotes the entire texts of the second Manifesto of Catherine the Great, Zeittafel, pp. 126-130; cf. 125-126.

⁸⁸ Victor Peters, ed., Zwei Dokumente: Quellen zum Geschichtsstudium der Mennoniten in Russland (Winnipeg: Echo-Verlag, 1965), pp. 12-13; Penner, Weltweite Bruderschaft, p. 121. For a German translation of the original text of the Manifesto see David Heinrich Epp, Die Chortitzer Mennoniten: Versuch einer Darstellung des Entwicklungsganges derselben (Odessa: Druck von A. Schultze, 1889), pp. 3-9. Hildebrand, Zeittafel, pp. 126-130.

to reduce present holdings.⁸⁹ This was the straw that broke the camel's back.

Again, the Mennonites had to face the fact that they were stepchildren without inheritance. Their rights were only those of guests, of pilgrims and strangers at best. Yet the idea that they were a religious people without country or citizenship in an adopted land became increasingly difficult to accept. These and similar reasons caused the Prussian Mennonites to look for a new land of freedom. The less privileged were the first to see Catherine's invitation as an act of divine providence and were eager to pursue it. The more prosperous and educated decided to stay in Prussia, at least for the time being.

A Movement Set in Motion

With the appointment of G. A. Potemkin in 1774 as governor general of South Russia, a vigorous and successful colonization program was set in motion. In 1786, the year Frederick the Great died, Potemkin delegated Georg von Trappe to go to Danzig and West Prussia and look for settlers.⁹⁰ Upon his recommendation "the Mennonite churches decided to send two representatives, Jakob Höppner and Johann Bartsch, at Russian expense, to spy out the promised land."⁹¹ In May 1787, these deputies met with General Potemkin and a year later with Catherine the Great herself.⁹² They succeeded in locating a suitable piece of land along the Dnieper River near Bereslaw. Upon negotiating necessary agreements they started their homeward journey. Their favorable reports and von Trappe's vigorous

⁸⁹ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 50; Horsch, Mennonites in Europe, p. 230; Reiswitz and Wadzeck, Beiträge, p. 249f.; Klaassen, Geschichte, pp. 245-251.

⁹⁰ Epp, Chortitzer Mennoniten, p. 3f.

⁹¹ Smith, Story, p. 251.

⁹² Epp, Chortitzer Mennoniten, pp. 21-24.

campaign for colonists heightened interest among the Mennonites of Prussia.⁹³

By the fall of 1788, 298 Mennonite families, most of them from the poorer class of farmers, tradesmen, and artisans, were on their way to Russia.⁹⁴ But they encountered untold difficulties:

1. Renewed war between Russia and Turkey forced them to put up temporary shelters at Dubrovna, still far from their destiny.

2. Lack of food, inadequate housing, inclement winter weather, and the uncertain future brought emotions to a boiling point in some and to despair in others.

3. The Frisian-Flemish division raised its ugly head again in magnified ways. Since they were of the poor and uneducated class, there was not a single elder among either group to administer communion, baptize, and perform marriage ceremonies. Yet there were ten young couples who wanted to get married. The Flemish congregation in Danzig finally decided to confirm a selected elder by letter. This hardly settled the matter for the Frisians and the quarrel continued.

4. Worse yet, Potemkin informed the deputies that they could not settle on the original fields chosen near Bereslaw, but would have to move farther up the Dnieper River near a small tributary called Chortitza.⁹⁵

Pioneering and Expanding

When the pioneers arrived at their new destination in July 1789, they named the first Mennonite colony in Russia after the river Chortitza. Here they made some shocking discoveries. For one thing, the money promised by the

⁹³ Epp, Chortitzer Mennoniten, pp. 35f., 40-47.

⁹⁴ David G. Rempel, "The Mennonite Migration to New Russia," Mennonite Quarterly Review 9 (1935), 109-110.

⁹⁵ Smith, Story, pp. 252-253; Rempel, "Mennonite Migration," pp. 110-113.

government was not only slow in coming, but much of it had been short-routed from the hands into the pockets of greedy public officials. They also discovered that the belongings they had shipped on river barges had been handled in the most inordinate manner. Whatever had not been ruined by exposure to water and weather had been plundered. Trunks and crates had been broken open. Such articles as "clothing, personal effects, and precious heirlooms were taken out and exchanged for stones and other useless freight."⁹⁶ Finally, they discovered that the indigenous people (described as Diebsgesindel) of neighboring lands had little regard for property rights: they not only intercepted and appropriated the building materials that floated down the river, meant for the new settlers, but also came directly to the villages and took whatever was accessible and worth taking.⁹⁷

The original settlers founded eight villages in Chortitza. But the Napoleonic wars had caused renewed hardships for Mennonites in Western Europe.⁹⁸ Thus periodic waves of immigrations from Danzig and Prussia (1796, 1803, 1804, and 1805) demanded radical land expansion in Russia. In 1804-1805, 380 families settled seventeen settlements in the Molotschna. This colony became the second Mennonite center in South Russia and, according to an official report, was "the very heart of the economic and cultural Mennonite intellegentsia as well as the pride and favored child of the Russian colonization efforts."⁹⁹

In 1828, Elder Wilhelm Lange of the Brenkenhofswalde congregation appealed to the Czar for a permit that would allow the entire congregation to settle in Russia.

⁹⁶ Epp, Chortitzer Mennoniten, pp. 73-74; Peters, Zwei Dokumente, pp. 31-33; Smith, Story, p. 254.

⁹⁷ Klaassen, Geschichte, pp. 254-256; Epp, Chortitzer Mennoniten, p. 75.

⁹⁸ Klaassen, Geschichte, pp. 259-269.

⁹⁹ Klaassen, Geschichte, p. 257. The story of Molotschna has been written by Franz Isaac, Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte derselben (Halbstadt, Taurien: H. J. Braun, 1908).

Permission was granted, and in 1834 the forty-two families moved to Molotschna, where they established the colony Gnadenfeld (Field of Grace) the following year. These Mennonites brought with them both the Moravian and Pietistic legacy, namely the missionary vision of the church, and a spirit of openness to spiritual renewal and cultural progress.¹⁰⁰

Ethnoreligious Life Prior to 1860

At no time in Mennonite history have the tensions between movement and institution, or maintenance and mission, been more severely tested than between the 1810s and 1860s. The type of ethnoreligious church life that had dominated the Mennonites in Prussia for many generations became the basis for the institutions of the Mennonites in Russia. The structure was designed to embrace all areas of ecclesiastical, political, social, cultural, and economic life. However historical and cultural realities of the new context made some modifications, adaptations, and even innovations mandatory--and that without the consistent benefit of strong leadership.¹⁰¹

Times of Testings

The struggles accompanying inevitable change within the Russian milieu were long and hard, and the ongoing tensions were less than creative. John B. Toews has captured the essence of those tensions in the following words:

Initially the Russian Mennonites were a wandering people settling on a new frontier. In their exodus from Prussia, they often left the accumulated wisdom of past decades behind. Their men of learning instinctively sensed that an established economy of

¹⁰⁰ Penner, Weltweite Bruderschaft, p. 77; Isaac, Molotschnaer Mennoniten, p. 18.

¹⁰¹ The organizational church structure in Prussia and in Russia was nearly identical. The differences arise when cultural, economic, and political factors were brought to bear on the life of the Mennonite congregations. Cf. Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 50 and 53; Epp, Chortitzer Mennoniten, pp. 111-112.

wide-spread literacy better ensured cultural continuity in a new land where questions other than survival appeared peripheral. They knew that the practice of their art was not an acceptable option on the expansive Russian steppe. They could not expose their modest treasure to the cross-winds of a new language and new culture. The intellectual had too much to lose. There was no niche for him in the villages of that harsh frontier and so he remained in Prussia. Thus, the first colonists arrived in Chrotitz [sic] with only fragments of their intellectual legacy, and for decades these pieces lay scattered. No one had the ability to reconstruct the mosaic and to reshape the missing pieces. An occasional teacher left Prussia with the intent of providing enlightenment, but he lived in only one village and that for only a few years. Relief for the Russian Mennonite cultural plight only began some four decades after the initial settlement, possibly with the mass migration of the Gnadenfeld congregation from Prussia in 1835. Until then, the elder functioned as virtually the only generative force in matters of religion and intellect.¹⁰²

Under these circumstances the Mennonites developed their own subculture, which in turn shaped their socioreligious mentality and produced their ethnomorphic world view. These traditions became foundational for both their modus vivendi and modus operandi. The predominant atmosphere of nominal Christianity with all the marks of an exclusive, ethnic subculture became particularly evident among church leaders. Their sociopolitical structures and their attitude to mission are negative phenomena of ethnocentrism in a major key.

Philosophy of Church Leadership

Mennonites have always defended the biblical principle of all believers so basic to the Anabaptist understanding of the Believers' Church. But during their sojourn in Russia they experienced an impoverishment of ecclesiastical leadership. There seemed to emerge an unbelieving priesthood in place of a priesthood of all believers. This was especially true during the first half of the nineteenth

¹⁰² John B. Toews, "The Russian Mennonite Intellect of the Nineteenth Century," in P.M. Friesen and His History: Understanding Mennonite Brethren Beginnings, ed. Abraham Friesen (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, 1979), pp. 1-2.

century. The missionary vision had long been abandoned, the lines between the Gospel and culture blurred, and the demarcations between biblical norms and sociocultural forms largely disregarded.¹⁰³ The philosophical shift is obvious.

From servanthood to officebearer. The early Anabaptist leaders simply emerged and with the respect of and credibility among the people, moved forward as servants of their followers. But after Menno Simons' death in 1561, the second and third generations began to elect leaders by casting lots or some other method.¹⁰⁴

Since Mennonite church polity has always been more congregational than episcopal or synodal in character, the local congregation with its council constituted a near-absolute autonomous religious community.¹⁰⁵ That had been true in Prussia and was so in Russia. Church leaders were elected by all baptized members, and all male members were potential leaders. This operational principle was carried over from the early Anabaptists. When they decided to be baptized and join the church, they declared their willingness to become evangelists or missionaries to the world.¹⁰⁶ The theory of that Anabaptist principle had been maintained by the Mennonites, but the function had changed: no longer was the male baptismal candidate expected to missionize, but he "had to promise to assume an Amt should he be elected."¹⁰⁷

It is the frequent use of the term Amt instead of Dienst in both Prussian and Russian Mennonite literature that

¹⁰³ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 255-257, 170-171.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Rodney Sawatzky, "Autonomy and Accountability: Church Polity within the Conference of Mennonites in Canada," Mennonite Reporter, September 19, 1983, Supplement Section B, pp. 1-4.

¹⁰⁵ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 53.

¹⁰⁶ Franklin H. Littell, The Origins of Sectarian Protestantism: A Study of the Anabaptist View of the Church (New York: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 112, 118-119. See also Chapter 2 of this study.

¹⁰⁷ Schreiber, Prussian Mennonites, p. 28.

suggests a profound shift in the understanding of leadership. To be elected was an honor, a mark of status, gratuitously given to the one elected by the congregation.

According to an old Confession, even the deacon was said to hold an "office" rather than to perform a service in the church.¹⁰⁸ One of the records states:

Only the Lord Jesus Himself is the supreme head of the church. We recognize no rank of office or order of superiority on earth. The church elects from its own membership elders, teachers and deacons and places them into office [Amt] through ordination.¹⁰⁹

Such a disclaimer to rank and office seems to have been more theory than actuality.

From equality to hierarchy. With the passage of time a type of hierarchical order found its way into heart and mind of congregational leadership. The concept of the priesthood of all believers became more rhetorical idealism than existential realism. Even the order in which the various ministries are listed--elder, teacher, deacon--suggests more than mere function and division of labor. Three distinct offices made up the leadership structure in a vertical dimension from the top down.

First, there was the elder, often called bishop or presbyter.¹¹⁰ The qualifications for this office were based on John 21:15-17 and I Timothy 3:1-7. Education was desirable, but not prerequisite. The elder was a highly respected person. He possessed earned status, wielded authority, and exercised great influence on his fellow

¹⁰⁸ Confession, oder kurzes und einfältiges Glaubensbekenntniß derer so man nennet die vereinigte Flamische, Friesische und hochdeutsche Taufgesinnte Mennoniten-gemeinde (Odessa: Franzow and Nitzsche, 1853). Articles V and VI speak of the "Amt der Lehrer" and "Amt der Diakonen."

¹⁰⁹ Epp, Chortitzer Mennoniten, p. 111.

¹¹⁰ Schreiber is correct when he states that the term "bishop" was applied to the elder in some American congregations, Prussian Mennonites, p. 27.' But he neglects to note that the same designation was also applied to the first elder in Russia. Epp, Chortitzer Mennoniten, pp. 84 and 111.

workers as well as on lay members.¹¹¹ As the unquestioned head of the congregation, the elder "preaches, has the cure of souls [Seelsorge],¹¹² exercises discipline and leadership, baptizes, dispenses the Lord's Supper, and consecrates, i.e., commissions [ordains] the elected elders, teachers and deacons."¹¹³

Second in line was the teacher, also called admonisher or preacher.¹¹⁴ Some congregations had more than one teacher who assisted the elder in his often difficult role.¹¹⁵ In fact, the teachers participated in all official congregational functions such as preaching, admonishing, marrying, and burying. But they did not administer the means of grace, except in unusual circumstances when no elder was available.¹¹⁶

The third person in the structure was the deacon, known as Almoner or Beutelträger (purse carrier). His duty was to assist the elder in baptismal and communion services, function as custodian or trustee of congregational property,

¹¹¹ Schreiber, pp. 27-28; Epp, Chortitzer Mennoniten, p. 111.

¹¹² P. M. Friesen, Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Brüderschaft in Rußland (1789-1910) im Rahmen der mennonitischen Gesamtgeschichte (Halbstadt, Taurien: Verlagsgesellschaft "Raduga," 1911), p. 44. The translators of the English edition have made an unfortunate choice by translating Seelsorge with "cure of souls." Granted, Seelsorge is difficult to translate, yet "pastoral care," or "spiritual nurture," or even "care of souls" would certainly be an improvement over "cure of souls." Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 50.

¹¹³ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 50.

¹¹⁴ Schreiber, Prussian Mennonites, p. 27; Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 50, 53. In a pastoral letter from the Danzig congregation to the early church in Chortitza the order of expressed leadership is "Älteste, Lehrer und Diakonen." There is no mention of either preacher or admonisher. Epp, Chortitzer Mennoniten, p. 88.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Epp, Chortitzer Mennoniten, pp. 83-94.

¹¹⁶ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 51.

care for the needy, and look after other charitable activities of the church.¹¹⁷

The elders, teachers, and deacons constituted the official Lehrdienst (teaching ministry) of the congregation and functioned simultaneously as the Kirchenrat (church council). But only the Bruderschaft (brotherhood), which consisted of all adult male members, had final jurisdiction over matters of doctrine, discipline, and finances. Either the elders or the church council had prerogative and duty to call the Bruderschaft together whenever deemed necessary.¹¹⁸

From authority to authoritarianism. At least three factors contributed to this shift. First, the elder was given considerable civic authority. This meant that such dynamics as brotherhood and consensus central to the free church tradition were frequently counterbalanced, if not overshadowed, by the power given to the elder.¹¹⁹ Although his role was perceived to be primarily spiritual, in actuality it was just as much political.

Second, the elder was economically self-sufficient. Since spiritual leaders were expected to work without remuneration, either in kind or in currency, they had to belong to the economically advantaged. This placed the elder in a unique position of social prestige and power. The only person more powerful than he was a member of the wealthy landed gentry holding either a civil or some other prestigious public office.¹²⁰ We may note parenthetically

¹¹⁷ Hermann Gottlieb Mannhardt, Die Danziger Mennonitengemeinde: Ihre Entstehung und ihre Geschichte von 1569-1919 (Danzig: Selbstverlag der Danziger Mennonitengemeinde, 1919), p. 40; Schreiber, Prussian Mennonites, pp. 27-28; Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 50-53.

¹¹⁸ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 51.

¹¹⁹ John B. Toews, Czars, Soviets, and Mennonites (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1982), p. 17.

¹²⁰ Toews, Czars, pp. 17-19; Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 50-51, 156ff.; J. A. Toews, A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1977), p. 19.

that the tension between the rich Landwirte (landlords) and the poor Anwohner (marginal settlers) reached crisis proportions: by 1865 there were in the Molotschna Colony alone 2,356 landless workers and only 1,384 landed farmers.¹²¹

Third, the elder lived in a political world of authoritarianism and absolutism. In order to maintain at least a relative balance of power between the Mennonite state and church, he had authority to carry out his role either as a civil despot or a spiritual shepherd. Whether or not he chose to do so depended on personal character and given circumstances.¹²²

From nurture to starvation. Another shift pertained to intellectual and spiritual realms. Since neither the church nor the state made provision for training spiritual leaders, their Bible knowledge usually did not rise above elementary school level. "This, coupled with almost complete cultural isolation, inevitably produced an intellectual stagnation and a leadership with very limited mental horizons."¹²³ Added to spiritual malnutrition and lack of intellectual development was a stunted level of religious experience. "Converted preachers or elders," asserts one writer, "were rare exceptions."¹²⁴ But there were exceptions. There were voices crying in the wilderness and calling Mennonites to make fundamental changes in their religious, cultural, and structural ways of life.¹²⁵

From apostleship to apostolic succession. The most shocking discovery for the historian is that Mennonite elders defended the doctrine of apostolic succession for themselves. On December 15, 1864, the Molotschna Council

¹²¹ Dyck, Introduction, p. 133.

¹²² Toews, Czars, pp. 17-19.

¹²³ Toews, History, p. 19.

¹²⁴ Quoted by Toews, History, p. 20.

¹²⁵ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 93-95, 102-105, 133-134, 143-153, 161, 252f.

of Elders drafted the most revealing document extant on the leadership question. Addressed "To the Most Honorable Area Administrative Office in Halbstadt,"¹²⁶ the Elders declared themselves to stand in the "traditional apostolic church organization"¹²⁷ because, they said, like the apostles, they had been "ordained by the Lord Himself."¹²⁸ Since the Mennonite Brethren appointed their own leaders without ecclesiastical sanction by the institutional church and outside of the "ecclesiastical church order" of the larger Mennonite body, the Elders refused to recognize the Brethren as a church, denied their leaders the right to administer the sacraments, and pronounced marriages performed by them illegal and void.¹²⁹ Only the one ordained by an official elder, so the document goes on to declare, has, as successor and heir of the apostles, the right to ordain and administer the sacraments.¹³⁰

The Making of an Ethnic People

Ecclesiastical leadership alone proved inadequate, yet it remained an integral part of the emerging order, which might be described as a subcultural Mennonite micro-state isolated from the cultural mainstream of the Russian macro-state.

The making of a people is always a slow process. For the Mennonites this process had already been in motion in Western Europe, and continued on its course over many decades of migration (1789-1865).¹³¹ Each new wave of immigrants brought with it old ideas. Thus the total

¹²⁶ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 255. It should be noted that neither the Ohrloff Elder Johann Harder nor Elder Friesen of the Kleine Gemeinde gave consent to the declaration of the Council of Elders.

¹²⁷ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 256.

¹²⁸ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 255.

¹²⁹ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 256.

¹³⁰ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 255-257, 170-171, note 57.

¹³¹ Toews, Czars, pp. 3-5.

experience was more than a mere historical event and geographical relocation; it was the completion of a transition from dynamic movement to subcultural ethnic community.¹³²

Except in their religious beliefs and practices, the Mennonites in Switzerland, the Netherlands, Germany, and Prussia had become more and more integrated into the cultural mainstream of society. But that cannot be said of the Mennonites in Russia. They did not fully acculturate, or socially integrate, or economically amalgamate. Instead, they "developed into a separate people, socially independent and clearly distinct from both the larger Russian society and other German-speaking colonies in that country."¹³³ E. K. Francis sees two fundamental factors causing the closed system of Russian Mennonitism--one subjective, the other objective.

Subjectively the Mennonite immigrants were motivated not only by the desire to escape the threat to their religious principles and economic welfare, but also by the positive hope, always present among the sectarians, of finally realizing the utopian community suggested by the moral and social ideals of their religion, without outside interference and independently from the wicked "world." Objectively they were confronted with a legal framework provided by the Russian government which not only permitted the almost complete segregation of homogeneous groups but tended to increase and protect their homogeneity, closure, and self-sufficiency.¹³⁴

Homogeneity here is not to be understood phylogenetically. For in that sense the Mennonites were neither a Hauptvolk nor a Volk in general; they were not even a Volksgruppe--a people group--implying origin from a single Volk. They were rather a conglomeration of different

¹³² Professor E. K. Francis of the University of Notre Dame has entitled the first chapter of his sociological studies of the Mennonites in Manitoba, "From Religious Movement to Ethnic Group." In Search of Utopia (Altona, MB: D. W. Friesen and Sons, Ltd., 1950), p. 9.

¹³³ E. K. Francis, "The Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia," Mennonite Quarterly Review 25 (1951), 174.

¹³⁴ Francis, "Mennonite Commonwealth," pp. 174-175.

European peoples such as Swiss, German, Dutch, French, Polish, etc. While their overwhelming Dutch ethnicity has been evident for centuries, their ethnic homogeneity in Russia must be understood in terms of a common historical experience, mutual territoriality, biological relationships, geographic isolation, socioeconomic interests, religious-cultural aspirations, and low degree of interaction with the Russian peoples. Such a context was most conducive to completing the process of forging the Menno tribes into a socioreligious clan of extended families in a closed society.¹³⁵

A Mennonite Triple Alliance

Like all people, the Mennonites in South Russia needed a government for themselves. The early pioneers of the mother colonies¹³⁶ had learned by trial and error to survive both as a church and as a people in a new cultural context. In the struggle of that process they had constructed their own organizational system in response to the terms laid down in the Charter of Privileges¹³⁷ and the

¹³⁵ Francis, "Mennonite Commonwealth," p. 174, note 2. Francis, In Search of Utopia, p. 20f. Prof. Adolf Ehrt states that 90 percent of the Russian Mennonites were of Dutch origin. Das Mennonitentum in Rußland von seiner Einwanderung bis zur Gegenwart (Berlin: Julius Beltz, 1932), pp. 4-6.

¹³⁶ There were four original colonies occupied by Mennonites from Western Europe: (a) Chortitza, 1789f.; (b) Molotchna, 1804f.; (c) Trakt or Koppental, 1853; and (d) Old Samara or Alexandertal, 1861. Cornelius Krahn, "Russia," Mennonite Encyclopedia, vol. 4, pp. 381-392, map and chart, pp. 382-383.

¹³⁷ The three official documents outlining the privileges and restrictions of the first generation Mennonite colonists in Russia are: (a) The Manifesto or Gnadenbrief of Catherine the Great published July 22, 1763; (b) the Confirmation of the Privileges based on the Petition of the Mennonites made in 1788, the year prior to the first emigration from Prussia to Russia; and (c) the Charter of Privileges also referred to as the Gnadenbrief issued by Paul I, on September 6, 1800. Translations of the original documents can be found in Epp, Chortitzer Mennoniten, pp. 3-9, 24-32; Isaac, Molotschnaer Mennoniten, pp. 5-7; cf. Peter Epp, Die Mennoniten in Russland (Steinbach, MB: Derksen Printers, n.d.), p. 142; Hildebrand, Zeittafel, pp. 125-130.

dictates of the Russian context.¹³⁸ Most of the thirty-seven daughter colonies¹³⁹ patterned their sociopolitical, cultural, and religious structures after those of their mother colonies. Each colony formed, as it were, its own triple alliance¹⁴⁰ dominating civic, religious, and cultural affairs.

First, there was the Gebietsamt. This administrative office was designed to keep law and order in civic matters within each given colony. It was a quasi-autonomous political organization simple in structure, powerful in jurisdiction, and effective in function. The Oberschulze or mayor was elected by the people as administrative head of the entire colony. His power and influence were significant both in internal affairs through the Gebietsamt and in relationship to the regional Russian governor through the Fürsorgekomitee für ausländische Kolonisten, a kind of Bureau of Colonization or Supervisory Commission.¹⁴¹

P. M. Friesen refers to David Friesen--for eighteen years (1848-1865) Oberschulze in the Molotschna--as a man who was fast allmächtig (nearly omnipotent) in his office.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Toews, Czars, p. 4; Francis, "Mennonite Commonwealth," p. 176.

¹³⁹ Due to continued influx of immigrants from Prussia and rapid population increase, shortage of land and the question of Lebensraum reached crisis proportions. As a result, there emerged a landless class. That is why the first two colonies looked for new land where the younger generation might settle. Between 1836 and 1927 a total of thirty-seven daughter colonies were founded by the four mother colonies for this purpose. Krahn, "Russia," pp. 381-383.

¹⁴⁰ I am using the term "triple alliance" primarily as a functional concept and not in a political sense of the historical Triple Alliance formed by Bismarck in 1882 between Germany, Austria, and Italy in order to secure Germany's position against the possible French revanche. Cf. Robert Ergang, Europe Since Watderloo, 2nd ed. (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1961), pp. 240, 354.

¹⁴¹ Francis, "Mennonite Commonwealth," p. 176, note 4. See also Toews, History, p. 21.

¹⁴² Friesen, Mennonitische Brüderschaft, p. 166; cf. Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 203.

To understand what P. M. Friesen means I quote the following words from a letter written by the Oberschulze to the Mennonite Brethren, who had seceded from the larger Mennonite Church on January 6, 1860:

We [the triple alliance] give you one month to think it over. If within that time you do not return to the church, measures will be taken in earnest to execute church verdicts against you and to disfranchise you as colonists and to banish you from our midst.¹⁴³

Each village had its own Dorfschulze (village mayor) in charge of the local assembly and village affairs. His responsibilities were many. He "acted not only as chief executive officer and mayor, but also as tax collector, justice of the peace, and police judge."¹⁴⁴ At one point in the early history of the Russian Mennonites the Schulze exercised enormous power in the villages and was bidden to report any misconduct of a Mennonite citizen to the Russian authorities. A document penned by commissioner Johann von Brackel, head of the Advisory Council in Odessa, and addressed to the Mennonites in Chortitza (1792?), states in no uncertain terms the duty and position of the Schulze in relation to the villagers:

The people of the village shall under all circumstances be subject and obedient to the village mayor who has the authority to execute physical punishment. They shall promptly carry out his orders without any resistance whatever, because these orders do not come from him, but from the superior government. Whoever resists them [the orders] shall be considered a rebel against the German [land of origin] and against Russia, and shall be punished according to our laws.¹⁴⁵

Somewhat later this authority was transferred from the Schulze to the Oberschulze as head of the colony.

Second, there was the Landwirtschaftsverein. This Agricultural Society was also instituted by the imperial Supervisory Commission in Odessa. Johann Cornies (1789-1848) almost single-handedly gave shape, content, and

¹⁴³ Quoted by Toews, History, p. 45.

¹⁴⁴ Francis, "Mennonite Commonwealth," p. 179.

¹⁴⁵ Epp, Chortitzer Mennoniten, p. 117.

direction to this powerful Board of Trade and Agriculture, of which he was the first president.¹⁴⁶ No other person has influenced the Mennonite communities in Russia as decisively and permanently in church life, agriculture, architecture, social welfare, industry, and education as Cornies. By 1839 he had succeeded in establishing an educational system that was second to none in all of rural Russia.¹⁴⁷

Whatever measures Cornies undertook in the name of cultural and economic progress were both sanctioned and enforced by the Gebietsamt of the colony with the aid of the Supervisory Commission in Odessa. Sometimes this meant deposition of church elders and excommunication of those who stood in opposition to such measures. In 1847, Heinrich Wiens was forcefully removed from his office as elder of the Margenau-Schönsee congregation, stripped of all privileges as a Mennonite, and "condemned to life-long exile from Russia."¹⁴⁸ Six years earlier elder Jakob Warkentin of the large Lichtenau church had met a similar fate through similar actions by the same people. Initially, Warkentin might have felt quite secure since he had charge of about 75 percent of the total membership of the Molotschna colony. Yet when he opposed some of the measures taken in the name of progress, he was quickly defrocked and

¹⁴⁶ For the significance of this Society and Cornies's influence on Russian Mennonitism see Walter Quiring, "Johann Cornies--A Great Pioneer," Mennonite Life 3, (July 1948), 30-34, 38; M. S. Harder, "A Pioneer Educator--Johann Cornies," Mennonite Life 3 (October 1948), 5-7, 44; Lee Roy Just, "Influences of Johann Cornies Upon the Major Social Institutions of the Mennonites of South Russia," Master's thesis, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, 1948; David H. Epp, Johann Cornies: Züge aus seinem Leben und Wirken (Rosthern, Sask.: Echo-Verlag, 1946).

¹⁴⁷ Walter Quiring and Helen Bartel, Als ihre Zeit erfüllet war: 150 Jahre Bewahrung in Russland (Saskatoon: Quiring and Bartel, 1964), p. 20; Francis, "Mennonite Commonwealth," pp. 178-179.

¹⁴⁸ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 143; cf. Toews, History, p. 23; Isaac, Molotschnaer Mennoniten, pp. 114-116.

the church was divided into three congregations to weaken its opposition to civil authorities.¹⁴⁹

Between 1820 and 1850 the Mennonites of South Russia went through a kind of Kulturkampf¹⁵⁰ and Kirchenkampf¹⁵¹ that left the already fragile church in an extremely volatile state. But in its weakness lay its strength and in its defeat the potential for redemption. For it is precisely in times of stress and crises, as anthropologists point out, that people in a quasi face-to-face society are open to change, revitalization, and renewal.¹⁵² That was also true of the Mennonites in Russia.

Third, there was the Kirchenkonvent or Council of Elders. In 1850 this body declared itself to be "the highest ecclesiastical authority of the churches" of the Mennonite colonies in Russia.¹⁵³ Assisted by the teachers and deacons, the Kirchenkonvent was in charge of all matters pertaining to religious affairs and can be seen as the ecclesiastical counterpart to the civil/political Gebietsamt and the economic/cultural Landwirtschaftsverein. Thus this triarchy of the Mennonite power structure consisted of a civil-political, a religious-ecclesiastical, and a cultural-economical component--none of which could function independently of the other. The three had in the course of a relatively short time formed an unholy Mennonite micro

¹⁴⁹ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 143; Toews, History, p. 23; Isaac, Molotschnaer Mennoniten, pp. 112-113.

¹⁵⁰ Toews, History, p. 23; Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 153-156.

¹⁵¹ For a treatment of the Kirchenkampf in Russia, see Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 143-154; cf. Erich Beyreuther, "Kirchenkampf," Evangelisches Gemeindelexikon, eds. Erich Gelbach, Helmut Burkhardt and Kurt Heimbucher (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1978), pp. 300-302.

¹⁵² Cf. Kasdorf, Conversion, chapter 7: "Revitalization and Renewal: An Ethnoreligious Concern," pp. 122-142.

¹⁵³ Quoted by Toews, History, p. 21; cf. Francis, "Mennonite Commonwealth," pp. 173-179, 200.

church-state alliance.¹⁵⁴ Therein lies the historical as well as theological irony.

The principle of separation between church and state was so valuable to the Anabaptist-Mennonites in the sixteenth century that they were willing to die for it. Less than ten generations later the same principle provided the glue to bond the ecclesio-political entities into one "Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia."¹⁵⁵ Even matters of morality and ethics became captives of ethnicity.

The structures of self-sufficiency and self-determination within the restrictive parameters of the Mennonite subculture had both positive and negative consequences. On the one hand they served as a deterrent to social assimilation, and on the other hand they isolated the Mennonites from being a missionary people.¹⁵⁶ The interests of biological self-preservation, ecclesiastical maintenance, and socioeconomic aggressiveness in an alien land set the stage for the development of a spiritual, cultural, and economic monopoly of the wealthy at the expense of the poor and landless class.¹⁵⁷ All authority of Russian Mennonites eventually became lodged in the Herrschaft der Wirte or rule of the landowners.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ In 1959, medical missionary Robert Dollinger as an outsider wrote an insightful article on the Mennonites in Paraguay entitled, "Ein Staat im Staate." Mennonitischer Gemeinde-Kalender, No. 59 (1959), pp. 46-54. What puzzled Dollinger more than anything was the form of Mennonite government. Is it democratic, republican, dictatorial, oligarchical, or hierarchial in nature? he asked. P. 50.

¹⁵⁵ Francis, "Mennonite Commonwealth," p. 173ff.

¹⁵⁶ Francis, "Mennonite Commonwealth," p. 174.

¹⁵⁷ Toews, History, pp. 23-24.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Cornelius Krahn, "Some Social Attitudes of the Mennonites of Russia," Mennonite Quarterly Review 9 (1935), 170-171; Robert Kreider, "The Anabaptist Conception of the Church in the Russian Mennonite Environment 1789-1870," Mennonite Quarterly Review 25 (1951), 25.

Ignored Mission Opportunities

The question that has never been answered satisfactorily is to what extent the Mennonites in Russia could have been missionarily involved had they chosen to do so. My contention is that they had ample opportunities, but ignored them either deliberately or imperceptively.

The missionary appeal in the Charter of Privileges.

Scholars have pointed out the restrictive clause in the original Charter.¹⁵⁹ According to the Charter, foreign colonists had unrestricted freedom in the exercise of their faith, except in two areas: (a) They were not allowed to build monasteries, and (b) they were warned under threat of severe punishment not to persuade any member of the Russian Orthodox Church to become a member of another church. It is most interesting to note, however, that the same Article which talks about mission prohibition among members of the Orthodox Church goes on to encourage Christian propaganda among the various peoples of Mohammedan faith within and near the Russian borders, "in order to appeal to them in a decent manner and to subject them to the Christian religion."¹⁶⁰

This clause was either unknown to or ignored by the Russian Mennonites, just as it has been overlooked by historians. That fact is even more striking when one considers that the Molotschna Mennonites were surrounded by Nogai or Nogaizy and other tribes of the larger Tatar people--groups with loose ties to the Muslim faith and none to the Orthodox Church. As early as the 1820s, Johann Cornies showed real interest in assisting the Nogai and

¹⁵⁹ Kreider, "Conception of the Church," p. 22.

¹⁶⁰ The Charter of Privileges (Article VI, paragraph 1) clearly states that the foreign colonists shall have complete religious freedom excepting two things: (1) building of monasteries, and (2) "proselytization of Christians living in Russia." But they are encouraged to evangelize "all nationalities belonging to the Mohammedan faith." Epp, Chortitzer Mennoniten, p. 5.

the Kalmuks with agricultural and educational development, but there is no reference whatever to evangelistic witness.¹⁶¹

There were, however, at this time Basel and Edinburgh missionaries working among the Nogai. The Basler Magazin,¹⁶² for example, gives extensive reports of the Swiss Tatar mission. Interwoven are letters and personal journals with frequent references to the Molotschna, other German colonies, villages, and churches. Some missionary names in these reports also appear in Mennonite records.¹⁶³ On July 27, 1825, missionary J. B. Saltet wrote to the Mennonite Elder Bernard Fast of Ohrloff (Halbstadt). The letter shows intimate acquaintance with the life of the Chortitza and Molotschna Mennonites.¹⁶⁴ In his diary of October 1826 Saltet describes in detail the work among the Tatars. Here again he makes reference to Mennonite villages, including Elisabeththal, where the MB Church was to emerge only a generation later.¹⁶⁵ The European missionaries liked to visit the Mennonites in their homes and churches, if and when admitted. Yet except for the welcome given by Elder Fast and his supporters at Ohrloff, they were usually turned away.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 194.

¹⁶² The reference is to the Magazin für die neueste Geschichte der evangelischen Missions- und Bibel-Gesellschaften, the first major Protestant mission journal established by the Basler Missionsgesellschaft in 1816. In Mennonite literature of the time it is simply referred to as Basler Magazin. Cf. Isaac, Molotschnaer Mennoniten, pp. 97-98. After 1856 it appeared as Neue Folge under the shorter title of Evangelisches Missions-Magazin until 1974 when it merged with the Evangelische Missionszeitschrift to form the current Zeitschrift für Mission.

¹⁶³ "Monatliche Auszüge aus dem Briefwechsel und den Berichten der brittischen und anderer Bibelgesellschaften," Basler Magazin 12 (1827), 359-384.

¹⁶⁴ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 142.

¹⁶⁵ "Aus dem Tagebuch des Missionars Saltet in Tiflis," Basler Magazin 19 (1827), 230-232.

¹⁶⁶ Isaac, Molotschnaer Mennoniten, p. 94.

The challenge of the Russian Bible Society. This opportunity, though brief, must be seen in the context of history. The thunder of Napoleon's armies in 1812 and the blazing fires of Moscow not only caused fear and trembling to the Russian people, but also effected major shifts in the political and spiritual climate of Russia. The government relaxed its laws and allowed Swiss, British, and German missionaries into the country.

On December 6, 1812, Lord A. N. Golizin, minister of cultural affairs, granted to Dr. J. Patterson of the British and Foreign Bible Society a legal charter to found the Russian Bible Society with full approval from the Czar.¹⁶⁷ A month later (January 11, 1813) the Society was formally dedicated at the Palais of St. Petersburg, with forty representatives from the highest government ranks participating. In a conversation between an evangelical missionary and an Orthodox bishop, the latter remarked: "The Russians have a proverb, 'When it thunders, then the peasant crosses himself.'" Then he thoughtfully added that, indeed, it had thundered when Napoleon's troops had moved in, and that the founding of the Bible Society was a sign that the Russian people were crossing themselves.¹⁶⁸ In that same metaphorical vein, even Czar Alexander I crossed himself as the thunder of French troops rolled in to crush his power. When he finally returned as victor over Napoleon he joined the Bible Society and continued to support it with generous gifts.¹⁶⁹ All levels of evangelical Christians, particularly the Stundist movement, received a tremendous boost through

¹⁶⁷ It is of interest that Czar Alexander I was for about eight years under the decisive Christian influence of the Pietist Baroness Juliane von Kruedener who herself had experienced profound repentance and conversion through the single witness of a Moravian cobbler in Riga. Hans Brandenburg, Christen im Schatten der Macht (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1974), pp. 32-33, 35-37; Waldemar Gutsche, Westliche Quellen des russischen Stundismus (Kassel: Oncken Verlag, 1957), p. 23.

¹⁶⁸ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 24.

¹⁶⁹ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 23.

the dissemination of Bibles in the land. The hour for the evangelization of Russia seemed to have arrived.¹⁷⁰

Local chapters of the Bible Society were organized in many places, including one in the Molotschna colony.¹⁷¹ Elder Fast with his congregation in Ohrloff supported the evangelical Bible movement. One congregation (probably Ohrloff) purchased Scriptures for its own members as well as for people in the area. On May 22, 1819, Robert Pinkerton of the British and Foreign Bible Society wrote to W. M. Popov of the Russian Bible Society about his visit to the Mennonites, describing the need for Bibles among them. Without identifying either person or village, Pinkerton lists an impressive purchase order by Mennonite leaders:

500 German Bibles, 400 New Testaments, 25 Slavonic Bibles and 40 New Testaments. These they want to distribute among their brothers and sisters in the Molotschna and the 400 Mennonite families who live in the region of Alexandrowka about 80 werst away.¹⁷²

Elder Fast and his supporters also showed some interest in mission work. They even admitted German missionary Christian Moritz to take part in the Lord's Supper in this church. Because of this and because of their cooperation with the Bible Society, Fast and his allies were reprimanded by other leaders and the sparks of mission forcefully subdued.¹⁷³

An illuminating case of misinterpretation and correction. The opponents of the Bible Society banded together to gain support from the Mennonite churches in

¹⁷⁰ Brandenburg, Christen, p. 23.

¹⁷¹ C. D. Bondar, Sekta Mennonitov v Rossiya (Petrograd: Tipographiya B. D. Smirnova, 1916), pp. 101-103; cf. August Dittrich and Felizian Zaremba, "Beylage No. III: Copie des Memoirs in Betreff der deutschen und schweizerischen Colonisten in der Krimm," Basler Magazin 7 (1822), 470.

¹⁷² "Auszüge aus dem Briefwechsel der russischen Bibelgesellschaft," Basler Magazin 4 (1819), 92-93.

¹⁷³ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 135-141; cf. Document #60, pp. 141-142; Isaac, Molotschnaer Mennoniten, pp. 95-98.

Prussia. In their letters they spread rumors about Elder Fast's personal character¹⁷⁴ and accused the founders of the Society of seeking "titles and honor" for themselves.¹⁷⁵ The correspondence between the opposition party in Russia and David Epp (1779-1863) of Heubuden in Prussia is illuminating, particularly Epp's response.

First, in support of Fast, Epp expressed disappointment that Mennonites in Russia were so opposed to the dissemination of the Gospel through either the Bible Society or any other mission endeavor.

Second, Epp dispelled the erroneous idea that the Bible Society identified itself with political and military structures by calling its leaders "president, director, and secretary." Nothing could be farther from the truth. He indicated that Russian Mennonites raised these objections as an excuse not to become involved in mission.¹⁷⁶

A letter to the churches in Prussia¹⁷⁷ and in support of the Bible Society helps to explain the issue:

And as far as the titles of president, director, etc., are concerned, let it be said that these have never been adopted by us, for we call our officers by their German designations, such as Vorsitzer (chairman), Beisitzer (vice chairman), Rechnungsfuehrer (treasurer) and Schriftfuehrer (secretary). The opponents of the Bible Society submit to you that these titles, which we do not even use, are the cause for their separation. Here they do not give this as their reason, but argue that the word Verein (society) should be abolished because it ties us to other religious groups and this will make us subject to military service. They said the same in "Ohm" Fast's very home before the budget advisor and Lord Contentius who, irritated by such remarks, raised his snuff-box to the sky and said: The two are as little related as my snuff-box and the moon.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Epp's entire document of June 30, 1822, appears in Isaac, Molotschnaer Mennoniten, pp. 95-98.

¹⁷⁵ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 138.

¹⁷⁶ Isaac, Molotschnaer Mennoniten, p. 96.

¹⁷⁷ According to Friesen (Brotherhood, p. 136), the letter was probably written by Tobias Voth who defended Elder Bernard Fast and other promoters of the Bible Society.

¹⁷⁸ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 137.

Third, Epp commended those Mennonites in the Molotschna who were no longer satisfied "with being bold spectators, but instead are prepared to become active contributors and helpers in the spread of the Word of God, the Bible, among their ignorant neighbors."¹⁷⁹

Fourth, he challenged the Russian Mennonites to take mission work more seriously and become involved in the proclamation of the Gospel among the "656 million pagan, 160 million Mohammedans, 9 million Jews, and 175 million Christians of whom the majority are either no longer true Christian or have inadequate knowledge of the Word."¹⁸⁰

Finally, Epp urged them to become informed on mission by reading the Basler Magazin, which provides historical data on how their own pagan forebears had been evangelized. Rather than sit together with pagan people in liquor parlors to drink, play cards, and indulge in all manner of foolish frivolities, exhorted Epp, they ought to be concerned with bringing the Gospel to them.¹⁸¹

The timing of Epp's letter (1822) was significant. It was written at a time when he was involved in a revival movement that had been brought to West Prussia by German Pietists.¹⁸² The mood of the letter clearly shows Epp's own enthusiasm for world mission and his concern over the Mennonites in Russia who resisted missionary efforts.

Resisting the Call to Renewal

The period between 1812 and 1826 brought several great preachers and teachers to Russia. Among them were such Catholic evangelists as Ignaz Lindl (1778-1845), a village

¹⁷⁹ Isaac, Molotschnaer Mennoniten, p. 96.

¹⁸⁰ Isaac, Molotschnaer Mennoniten, p. 97.

¹⁸¹ Isaac, Molotschnaer Mennoniten, pp. 96-97.

¹⁸² Ernst Crous, "Vom Pietismus bei den altpreußischen Mennoniten im Rahmen ihrer Gesamtgeschichte 1772-1945," Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter, Neue Folge No. 6, 11 (1954), 7-29, particularly, 8-21.

preacher from Bavaria, and Johannes Evangelista Goßner (1773-1858), a school teacher from Düsseldorf.¹⁸³ Then there were Johann Bonekemper (1796-1857), a Reformed pastor from Switzerland, and Tobias Voth, a Mennonite teacher from Brenkenhofswalde. All four had been converted and nurtured in the atmosphere of German Pietism.

Lindl and Goßner went to Russia in 1819 and 1820 respectively, making Odessa and St. Petersburg with surrounding areas the bases for their preaching mission. Lindl often preached under open skies, on meadows and hillsides, to crowds of 10,000 to 15,000 German-speaking listeners.¹⁸⁴ In these meetings, notes one writer, "there were flowing streams of tears and hundreds of people were revived and converted."¹⁸⁵ Goßner's preaching in the Maltheser Church was no less effective than Lindl's. Whoever understood German--Catholic, Lutheran, Orthodox, Brethren, or Reformed--came to hear the two preachers.¹⁸⁶ Like the prophets of old, they preached repentance and obedience of faith. Their vision was to convert all of Russia and to build the kingdom of God. Their time, however, was cut short by political interference and ecclesiastical fury, and in 1824 they were forced to leave the country.¹⁸⁷

But before Lindl left, he invited Bonekemper to take his place in Odessa. Bonekemper worked here for many years as one of the most effective revivalists in the Ukraine.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸³ J. Ellenberger, "Johannes Goßner," in Christlicher Gemeinde-Kalender der Konferenz badisch-pfälzischer Mennoniten (Frankfurt: L. Lichtenberg, 1896), pp. 92-100.

¹⁸⁴ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 690.

¹⁸⁵ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 13.

¹⁸⁶ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 27; Holsten, Evangelista Goßner, p. 34.

¹⁸⁷ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 24; cf. Holsten, Evangelista Goßner, pp. 31-40.

¹⁸⁸ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 11-14, 22-23. P. M. Friesen names Martin J. Boos along with Menno Simons, Thomas Kempis, Arndt, Spener, Francke, Zinzendorf, Hofacker, Wüst, Spurgeon, Carey, and others as most influential and best known men among the Mennonites in Russia, Brotherhood,

Voth also came to Russia by invitation to assume the role of principal of the Orloffer Vereinsschule in the Molotschna in 1822.¹⁸⁹ Thus he served as a contemporary of Lindl and Goßner for two years and much longer than that with Bonekemper.

The one common contribution which these four men made to Russian Christianity as a whole and to the German colonists--including the Mennonite--was the Bible study method known as Stunde, to which I will return in the next chapter. Suffice it to say here that the Stunde became a most powerful tool to create interest in Bible study, spark renewal in nominal settings, and deepen the life of new converts.

Critical Reflections

In these concluding pages I will reflect critically on major factors that have pulled generations of Mennonites toward maintenance rather than mission. In doing so, I will draw freely on principles and insights found in sociological, theological, and missiological disciplines.

Sociocultural Dynamics

The most striking phenomenon of the second-generation Anabaptist-Mennonite movement is the process of institutionalization. By this I mean the shift from the dynamics of event-character to the dogmatism of established traditions within the Christian church.

Both sociological and anthropological studies point out that every renewal or revitalization movement has inherent forces that cause it to move, and that sooner or later it is bound to wind up in the institution from whence it came. Such features as the charismatic qualities of first

p. 980. Cf. D. Petri, "Mission und Erweckung unter den Rußlanddeutschen vor hundert Jahren," Evangelisches Missionsmagazin, New Series 81 (1937), 10-18, 47-56; Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 19-20; Brandenburg, Christen, pp. 51-58.

¹⁸⁹ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 96.

generation leaders, the spontaneous nature of propaganda or missionary witness, and the unstructured and flexible character of religious expression in work, word, and worship are some of the more obvious examples of moving causes. The event character and experiential orientation of the movement are at first evident on every hand.¹⁹⁰ But the second generation usually gets caught in the generational process which Calvin Redekop calls the "sect cycle."¹⁹¹ Its common tendency is to change from the sect-type to the church-type of Christianity.

Paul Hiebert refers to this shift as the process of institutionalization. There are at least three clearly identifiable stages in any such process.¹⁹² First, formalization. This is the stage in which the implicit beliefs and informal practices of the founding fathers are transformed into the dogmatic statements and standardized practices of their followers. The ideas of strong leaders become the ideals of the followers. Jakob Ammann's legalistic dress code described earlier is a case in point.¹⁹³

The second stage is self-preservation. This occurs when the group leaders see certain advantages for themselves in maintaining existing patterns. Any change is perceived as a threat to their security or authority, and thus they concentrate their efforts on maintaining the status quo. The conflict between the Lammisten and Sonnisten in the Netherlands as well as the perception which some Mennonite

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Kasdorf, Conversion, pp. 146-153.

¹⁹¹ Calvin Redekop, "The Sect Cycle in Perspective," Mennonite Quarterly Review 36 (1965), 155-161. See the interesting book title by Richard G. Kyle, From Sect to Denomination: Church Types and Their Implications for Mennonite Brethren History (Hillsboro, KS: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1985). Kyle's book offers little new material of any substance and appeared too late to be beneficial for this study. Pages 43-73 are of some value.

¹⁹² Paul G. Hiebert, Cultural Anthropology (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1976), pp. 253-257.

¹⁹³ See this chapter, pp. 97-99.

elders in Russia had of the Bible Society and European missionaries serve to illustrate this stage.¹⁹⁴

The final stage is traditionalism. This is the sure result when the system becomes established in the socio-religious order and infused with the sociocultural and ethnoreligious values of the given community.¹⁹⁵

In my book on Christian Conversion in Context, I have described the shift of the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement to institutionalization as follows:

Its leadership can be defined as charismatic in character, rather than in terms of specializations. Its theology was implicit rather than explicit in systematic format. Its activities were need-oriented, rather than show-oriented. Its membership was voluntary and dynamic, rather than coercive and stalemated. Its life style was simple and submissive, commensurate with true discipleship under Christ's lordship, rather than assuming and dominating. But much of that changed with the third- and fourth-generations when self-maintenance gained high priority and the ingredients of true discipleship of the first generation were transformed into a system of established traditionalism.¹⁹⁶

The point I am making is that the shift from movement to institution is real and can have serious consequences for the church. However, one should not reach the erroneous conclusion that the movement has been destroyed and that the institution is its destroyer. Such conclusion assumes that the institution per se is bad. To be bad, the institution must become the object of religious life without the corrective benefits of the movement. But such an analysis is very partial and cannot do justice to either the movement because it is omitted, or to the institution because it is the sole object of criticism in isolation from the movement.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ See this chapter, pp. 137-141.

¹⁹⁵ Kasdorf, Conversion, p. 146.

¹⁹⁶ Kasdorf, Conversion, pp. 146-148.

¹⁹⁷ One of the best studies on the mutual interdependence of movement and institution is H. Richard Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God in America (New York: Harper, 1937), "Introduction," pp. 1-15.

That is why the transition from movement to institution must be seen as a painful struggle and cannot be defined in absolute terms.

In fact, the "generational pull," as I would like to call it, is always in two directions--forward and backward. It can be likened to a tug-of-war with equal power concentrated on each side. Only when the balance point is broken does the move begin in favor of the strongest pull. Therein lies the dialectical tension of the relationship between movement and institution. Or, as David Bosch points out, it is a tension between "spirit and office" or between "church and mission."¹⁹⁸

It cannot be said that the institution is totally deprived of "spirit" and "mission"; nor can it be claimed that a movement is altogether void of "office" and "church" characteristics. After all, as H. Richard Niebuhr notes, there is a dynamic element of prophetism within Christianity that is not only poured into the social fabric of the institution, but also "into individual souls."¹⁹⁹ And it is often the moral courage and the spiritual power of the individual souls that fertilize the institution with new life and play the role of midwifery in birthing a new movement. Such was the role of Moses and Elijah, the Apostle Paul and Francis of Assissi, Martin Luther and Menno Simons, John Wesley and Felician Zaremba, plus a thousand more whose names must go unlisted.

Theological Issues

Two related theological issues within Russian Mennonitism prior to 1860 stand out above all others because of their conspicuous absence rather than presence: the one was Christian conversion and the other, assurance of salvation. The latter was the direct consequence of the former, and both had their origin in Prussian church life. Here again two forces had been operative in shaping the

¹⁹⁸ Bosch, Witness, pp. 26 and 95.

¹⁹⁹ Niebuhr, Kingdom, pp. 165-166.

theological frame of mind of Mennonitism prior to the revival of the 1820s and 1830s in Prussia. One was external, coming from German Rationalism, which expedited the process of enculturation and secularization of the more wealthy class. The other was internal, stemming from orthodox Mennonite traditionalism, and was particularly pervasive among the less educated and less prosperous contingent of the Menno people.²⁰⁰ Neither force emphasized conversion and assurance of salvation. Later on a rigid Mennonite orthodoxy made its way to Russia with the early emigrants. This sociological situation enhanced the reduction of Mennonite theology to a sense of piety rooted in the Anabaptist tradition but lacking a dynamic, experiential faith. This orthodoxy also produced an ecclesiology that was centered in a socioreligious institution which in turn was based on historical and ethnic privileges rather than on theological convictions rooted in the teachings of the Scripture.

The consequences were more serious than might appear on the surface:

1. Both clergy and laity exercised penance, but knew of no repentance; therefore they lacked a vital relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior from sin and Lord of life. Neither Christ's atoning death on the cross nor his victorious resurrection from the dead was seen as being able to affect their lives in a significant way.

2. Most elders and teachers of the Bible resisted formal education as worldly pride and objected to Christian conversion as spiritual arrogance. They preferred to remain uneducated, and very few were converted.

3. Spiritual leaders were generally unskilled preachers and lacked the ability to pray freely in public. They read printed sermons and prayers inherited from earlier generations.

4. The elders often saw their ministry as a prestigious position rather than a calling from God, or a

²⁰⁰ Cf. Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 37-38, 92; Friedmann, Mennonite Piety, p. 3.

legacy to be cherished because it had been handed down to them from their great-grandfathers.²⁰¹

This situation continued in large segments of Mennonitism long after 1860. Although the concept of the new birth was theologically spelled out in the Confession of Faith²⁰² and was annually taught to the young in catechism classes,²⁰³ regeneration or conversion itself had ceased to be an existential reality in the life of most church members. Jakob Dirksen, one of the MB itinerant preachers, makes an interesting analogy by likening the faith of Mennonites in Russia to that of many Jews in his day who believed that "one has to do penance and suffer punishment for one's sins, and thereafter one will be saved." As Dirksen moved from one Mennonite village to another and from colony to colony, he became increasingly convinced how essential it was "to proclaim even among our own people the glad tidings that Jesus has saved us."²⁰⁴ He goes on to speak of much "pain and absence of peace" because people resisted conversion and, therefore, lacked assurance of salvation.²⁰⁵

Evidently, the Mennonites had become theologically satisfied by the mere creedal expression of repentance,

²⁰¹ Jacob P. Bekker, Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church, trans. by D. E. Pauls and A. E. Janzen (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the Midwest, 1973), pp. 32 and 22.

²⁰² Confession, oder kurzes und einfältiges Glaubensbekenntniß derer so man nennt die vereinigte Flämische, Friesische und Hochdeutsche Taufgesinnte Mennonitengemeinde, ed. Gemeinde zu Rudnerweide in Südrußland (Odessa: Franzow und Nitzsche, 1853). Cf. Articles II, III, and IV, pp. 4-9, 41-43.

²⁰³ D. H. Epp, Kurze Erklärungen und Erläuterungen zum "Katechismus der christlichen, taufgesinnten Gemeinden, so Mennoniten genannt werden" (1st ed. Jekaterinoslaw, Russia, 1896), 3rd. ed. (Rosthern, Saskatchewan: Dietrich H. Epp, 1941), see Chapter 3: "Von dem Glauben an Christum," especially questions 1, 6, and 8, pp. 124-139.

²⁰⁴ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 517.

²⁰⁵ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 516.

conversion and regeneration in their Confession of Faith. Yet they neither applied the concepts to themselves nor propagated their meaning in order to call others to repentance. Thus there was maintenance of theology without self-involvement or missionary activity. There was pre-occupation with dogmatism without "a dialectical relationship to the world."²⁰⁶

The balance between theology and mission was no longer an option. The church had lost both, its dynamic mission, and also its dynamic theology with regard to the existential reality of new life in Christ. "What we then get," says Bosch succinctly, "is not theology but rather dead orthodoxy." He is absolutely right. When authentic theology is conspicuous by its absence, "salvation becomes a treasure the Church has at her magnanimous disposal, the Gospel self-evidently a possession of the Church, the Kingdom of God an institution, and the new life in Christ a good habit."²⁰⁷ Into this trap the Mennonites of Russia had fallen.

Ecclesiological Distortions

Having lost the biblical church concept of the Anabaptist-Mennonite forefathers, notes Robert Kreider, "the Mennonites in Russia forfeited from the outset the possibility of being a brotherhood-type of church" with missionary concerns.²⁰⁸ Kreider's comment infers that the Charter of Privileges expressly forbade any missionary activity of the Mennonites among the people of the Orthodox Church.²⁰⁹ Thereby "they accepted a system of privileges which were bound to qualifications, not of faith, but of blood."²¹⁰ That meant one exclusive way of growth, namely

²⁰⁶ Bosch, Witness, p. 25.

²⁰⁷ Bosch, Witness, p. 25.

²⁰⁸ Kreider, "Conception of the Church," p. 22.

²⁰⁹ See footnote #160 in this chapter.

²¹⁰ Kreider, "Conception of the Church," p. 22.

biological reproduction. In other words, one had to be born an ethnic Mennonite to become a church member, and one had to be a church member to benefit from the privileges granted to the Mennonites.²¹¹ Whereas the church at one time had been the raison d'être of the Anabaptists, and religion had permeated every phase of life and action, it was now a mere ecclesiastical convenience fully institutionalized and designed for self-preservation in an alien land.

Under these circumstances both motivation and vision for missionary expansion had become obsolete. Membership was biologically perpetuated. Neither the once important values of conversion and regeneration nor the principles consistent with high moral and ethical standards were any longer presuppositions for church membership. One writer notes that "many concessions had to be made to other conflicting interests which frequently dominated and determined action."²¹² In many cases the rite of baptism had more civil and social than religious or spiritual significance because "it opened the way for young people to get married."²¹³

By the middle of the nineteenth century the Mennonite Church in Russia had by and large left behind the event character of the Believers' Church movement and opted for the status quo of the institutional church. Economic ascendance, cultural progress and above all the intensely competitive power struggles between the Kirchenkonvent of spiritual-religious leaders and the Gebietsamt of civic-community authorities had not only distorted their biblical church view, but also destroyed much of their moral will to

²¹¹ Toews, History, p. 20.

²¹² Toews, Czars, p. 17.

²¹³ Quoted by Toews, History, p. 21; cf. C. H. Wedel, Abriß der Geschichte der Mennoniten, vol. 3: Die Geschichte der niederländischen, preußischen und russischen Mennoniten (Newton, KS: Schulverlag von Bethel College, 1901), p. 168.

change. "Everybody joined the church, because everyone did."²¹⁴ The result was--with some exceptions--a neopagan Mennonite church which embraced all Mennonites of the Russian colonies. In 1856, the Agricultural Society assigned the teachers of the colony to research "the moral condition of the settlers of the Molotschna Mennonite region" and to present their findings as "unprejudiced assessments."²¹⁵ The thirty-seven essays²¹⁶ submitted gave a rather negative picture of Mennonite life in Russia. One writer stated that "the moral condition of the Mennonites in Russia is highly immoral." Others described it as "sadly lacking," "very low," "decayed in every way," and "bad."²¹⁷

Here again we sense the tension between what had once been an exclusive Believers' Church and what now had become an inclusive church of the masses. The ability of one to help, correct, and accommodate the other seems to have been absent. The ecclesiastical institution had forgotten how desperately it ~~needed~~ a new movement. All this makes Niebuhr's commentary in The Kingdom of God in America frightfully applicable to the situation of the Mennonites in Russia. He says that

institutions can never conserve without betraying the movements from which they proceed. The institution is static whereas its parent movement had been dynamic; it confines men within its limits while the movement had liberated them from the bondage of institutions; it looks to the past, the movements had pointed forward.²¹⁸

That is to say that postsixteenth-century Anabaptism in general and Mennonitism in Russia in particular had begun

²¹⁴ Kreider, "Conception of the Church," p. 23,

²¹⁵ Braun, "Die Kirchlichen Spaltungen," p. 8.

²¹⁶ Braun wrote in 1938 that thirty-seven essays were at that time still in the archives of the Landwirtschaftsverein in the Molotschna, "Die kirchlichen Spaltungen," p. 97. But it is not known where they have stayed.

²¹⁷ Quoted by Braun, "Die kirchlichen Spaltungen," p. 9.

²¹⁸ Niebuhr, Kingdom, p. 168.

to resemble more the institutional churches from which they had once seceded than the Believers' Church which their early fathers had founded (Table 2).²¹⁹ Whereas they had once devoted their energies to serve in God's kingdom as understood by the Believers' Church, they now appeared content to let the institution serve their needs, as defined by their leadership. A-people in world mission had become a church for self-preservation.

A Missiological Test

As I have shown in Chapter 3, the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement was a dynamic missionary and missionizing people. In the course of generational development, however, the members internalized both their missionary dimension and their missionary intention by becoming die Stillen im Lande. By the time they settled in Prussia there was little evidence of a dialectical relationship or any missionary responsibility towards the world. Their sojourn in Russia between 1789 and 1860 reveals some tensions in the relationship between mission opportunities and mission activities. In fact, there seems to have been a great deal of reluctance--if not outright resistance--to any kind of mission endeavor, but particularly to evangelism.

What I have referred to as God's hour for Russia might well have been the hour for Mennonites to become involved in

²¹⁹ My comparative analysis in Table 2 is based on Kreider's article, "The Anabaptist Conception of the Church in the Russian Environment," pp. 17-33. Additional helpful studies are Troeltsch, Social Teachings, vol. 1, pp. 331-343; Niebuhr, Kingdom, pp. 164-198, 209-210; Moberg, The Church as a Social Institution, pp. 73-126; Lesslie Newbigin, The Household of God (New York: Friendship Press, 1954), pp. 26-60, 82-93, 115-122, 162-168; H. Richard Niebuhr, Wilhelm Pauck, and Francis P. Miller, The Church Against the World (Chicago: Willett, Clark and Company, 1935), pp. 121-156; Joachim Wach, Sociology of Religion (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944), pp. 287-298; Joachim Wach, "Religious Organization," in Readings on the Sociology of Religion, eds. Thomas F. O'Dea and Janet K. O'Dea (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), pp. 79-83; A. Braun, "Die kirchlichen Spaltungen," pp. 7-18; Alexander Prieur, "Das täuferischmennonitische Gemeindeverständnis," pp. 7-9.

Table 2

Believers' Church and Institutional Church: A Comparative Focus

Focus	Believers' Church	Institutional Church
1. Conditions for Membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deliberate submission to Christ as Savior and Lord - Experience of new birth and conversion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Biological birth into the religio-cultural milieu of the (ethnic) community
2. Aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Voluntary fellowship of believers - Nonparticipation in the sociopolitical order 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Deliberate effort to be relevant and coextensive with the socioeconomic and political mood
3. Expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ethical community of filial love - Attraction to spiritual fellowship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Impersonally individualistic; - Anonymity; distance between members
4. Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rigid application of Matthew 18:15ff. - Exclusion from fellowship of those refusing to conform to norms or lapse from set standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relaxed corrective measures - Accepting and tolerant of all within social mores and cultural standards
5. Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Centered in the Scriptures and Apostolic church patterns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vested in church officer, traditional patterns, and culture
6. Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Servants of the believing community - Large representation of laypersons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ruling ecclesiastical officers and ranks - Small representation of membership
7. Laity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Active lay participation by entire congregation - Innovative service orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Passive church membership - Church attendance and conformity to tradition
8. Worship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Free and simple forms; innovative methods - Informal singing and sharing - Preaching the Word; spontaneous praying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Routinized liturgy - Traditional patterns - Centrality of sacraments
9. Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Through missionary and evangelistic outreach - Discipling and Christian nurture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Observing the sacraments - Religious education and catechetical formation
10. Concern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mission to the world, evangelistic outlook 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintenance of the church; social outlook
11. Makeup	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exclusive; the small flock called from the world to live in nonconformity to worldly orders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inclusive; the large church is part of the world and acquiescent to its power systems
12. Mindset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Theology of the cross and suffering - Discipleship under Christ's Lordship - Bearing fruit of the Spirit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Psychology of power and domination - Personal freedom more important than obedience; success mentality
13. Expectation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Heightened sense of eschatology; hence frequent millenarian outbursts - Intense hope of ultimate redemption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relaxed eschatological interests; hence strong focus on realized eschatology - Preoccupied with church preservation

mission. They had much in their favor: (a) the Imperial Charter to evangelize the Muslims was on their side and the Muslims were their neighbors; (b) the Bible Society had been established in the land and its agents were eager to involve the Mennonites in the distribution of the Word; (c) several mission societies were evangelizing among the Nogaizy people, and missionaries took every opportunity to inform the Mennonites about their own opportune hour; and (d) the Stunden of German Pietism had been introduced to the Christians of Russia and were as early as the 1820s conducted among the Mennonites by Tobias Voth, one of their own kind.

Yet there was very little response to any of these external mission opportunities. What then, we must ask, was the internal state of the Mennonite Church with regard to missionary involvement prior to 1860? Was there any vital spark of the missionary dimension evident in the church? If so, how did it manifest itself? What about its missionary intention or its actual missionizing activities? If, in fact, the missionary fire of the early Anabaptists--even if only in the form of an afterglow--was not yet totally quenched, what was its level of vitality?

I am proposing to convert Gensichen's useful missiological couplet of missionary dimension and missionary intention²²⁰ into a missiological gauge for the purpose of testing the missionary vitality of a congregation or denomination, whether local, regional, or international. "Everything the church is and does," contends Gensichen, "must have a missionary dimension, but not everything has a missionary intention."²²¹ Bosch interprets this by saying that

the Church's entire nature is missionary but she is not, in all her activities, explicitly aimed at the

²²⁰ Hans-Werner Gensichen, Glaube für die Welt: Theologische Aspekte der Mission (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1971), pp. 168-174, 244-249.

²²¹ Comment by Bosch, Witness, p. 199.

world. The Church must in all circumstances be "missionary," but she is not in every moment "missionising."²²²

Since, then, dimension presupposes intention, the test²²³ needs to include only the missionary dimension (Table 3).

On an ascending value scale from 1 to 10 with 10 having the highest value, and on the basis of the information we have about any church or denomination, it is possible to measure the level of the group's dimensional missionary fervor by checking the appropriate box of the scale against the corresponding question related to the missionary dimension. Question 1, for example, asks whether or not the church is able to attract and welcome outsiders. The answer for the Mennonite Church in Russia is obviously negative and No. 1 must be checked. For Question 5, however, I have checked No. 8, for it was during the Crimean war that the Mennonites demonstrated the ability to respond quickly and effectively to socio-economic need and human suffering. The other questions are all marked at the lower end of the scale with only Nos. 2 and 4 receiving the medium value of 5. This gives the Mennonite Church in Russia prior to 1860 a rather low overall score on its missionary dimension.

If we take seriously the thesis, as I believe we must, that "intention" can exist only on the basis of "dimension," and that only a church or denomination which manifests the missionary dimension as outlined in the test "can also be deliberately 'missionizing,' i.e., moving actively into the world,"²²⁴ then we must conclude that the Mennonite Church in Russia had lost its missionizing capacity. Although there were some positive traits

²²² Bosch, Witness, pp. 149-200.

²²³ Bosch's commentary on Gensichen's concepts of dimension and intention has been most stimulating in designing what I have called "A Missiological Test." Cf. Bosch, Witness, pp. 199-201, 98, 189.

²²⁴ See Chapter 6 of this study.

Table 3
A Missiological Test

Questions	Value Scale									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Is the church able to attract and welcome outsiders?										
2. Are the members beyond mere pastoral care, and themselves in the position to care pastorally for others?										
3. To what extent are lay people not merely spectators but participators in congregational ministries?										
4. In what measure are such things as love of neighbors and fellow-member, kindness, unity, joy, peace, obedience, and good works experienced in the bosom of the church?										
5. Is the church structure pliable enough to accommodate arising needs?										
6. In how far is the church declaring a message of hope to the world instead of defending its distinctives and dogmas for itself?										
7. Can the church offer people of various ethnic backgrounds a place to feel at home?										
8. To what extent does the church take advantage of existing mission opportunities?										

left, the church was as a whole a greater mission field than a mission force. The quiet in the land had become self-centered and mute about the grace of God in life and history of their forebears.

Yet the Spirit of God was stirring. New winds were blowing. A revival in mission was to come with a revival of the church. That will be the focus of the next chapter.

PART THREE

A New Dynamic

Mennonite Brethren Mission in Russia

Chapter 5

A MISSION CHURCH REBORN

Introduction

The Triune LORD of Creation, history, and redemption is not only interested in renewing his people; he also has unlimited resources for breathing new life into dry bones. God is in his people's midst and accompanies them on their journey. He knows their coming in and going out. He is mindful of their spiritual pilgrimage, which can be likened to the ebb and flow of the ocean's currents moved as much by inherent power as by circumstantial forces. God is in control of both, sometimes allowing them to be infused with new life from unexpected quarters. It is in that light in which James Juhnke's statement about Mennonite mission in general applies to the Mennonite Brethren Church and its mission in particular.

It was born the first time in the sixteenth century in the missionary consciousness of the Anabaptist left wing of the Protestant Reformation. Within a single century this early missionary thrust burned itself out in fires of persecution, dispersion, and sanctuary. It was born a second time in the nineteenth century when Mennonites latched onto a great worldwide Protestant missionary movement which had grown out of eighteenth-century Pietism and a subsequent evangelical awakening.¹

Mennonite Brethren mission is a twice-born movement. As I outline and analyze the historical forces that gave the second birth to the Mennonite Brethren as a missionary church in the context of Russian Mennonitism, I want to highlight the following aspects: (a) Pietist roots of Mennonite renewal; (b) hallmarks of spiritual renewal; (c) the birth of the Mennonite Brethren Church; (d) struggle for survival; (e) critical reflections; and (f) rekindling the mission dynamic.

¹ James C. Juhnke, A People of Mission: A History of General Conference Mennonite Overseas Missions (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1979), p. 1.

Pietist Roots of Mennonite Renewal

In previous chapters I have traced the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement from its dynamic beginnings in the early sixteenth century of Southern Europe through its spiritual decline during centuries of diaspora to its erosive traditionalism in the mid-nineteenth century of Southern Russia. Against that background, Pietism can be seen as a force of renewal acting as a midwife in birthing the Mennonite Brethren Church.

Tracing the Roots

Pietism is commonly classified in terms of its geographical concentration in Halle, Württemberg, and Herrnhut. But that categorization overlooks both Reformed and Catholic streams. Therefore, a confessional classification is more appropriate.² This approach is also in keeping with the interpretation of P. M. Friesen, who mentions representatives of all groups as having made positive contributions to the life of the Christian church in general and to the Mennonites in Russia in particular.³

Reformed Pietism. Inspired by German and Bohemian Mysticism as well as by English Puritanism, Reformed Pietism emerged in the Netherlands quite early in the seventeenth century. Convinced that the Protestant Reformation had not gone far enough to realize the biblical principles it had initially envisioned, Reformed Pietism aspired to reach that

² Hans Kasdorf, "Pietist Roots of Early Mennonite Brethren Spirituality," Direction 8, No. 3 (July 1984), 44-47. Elsewhere I have approached Pietism from a descriptive as well as geographical point of view. Cf. Hans Kasdorf, "Anabaptism and Pietism: Two Radical Christian Movements in Church History," pp. 22-32, and "A Survey of Pietism and its Confrontation with Orthodoxy," pp. 8-30, unpublished manuscripts, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 1982.

³ P. M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), trans. by J. B. Toews et al. (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Church, 1978), p. 980. Some of the materials incorporated here are based on the article by Kasdorf, "Pietist Roots," pp. 47-53.

goal. Its leaders were revivalists. They called for repentance and deeper godliness in personal and corporate life. The movement was so attractive to other Christian groups that even large numbers of the more evangelically-oriented Mennonites left their congregations and joined the Pietists.⁴ As we trace this movement to Germany, we find it concentrated around Krefeld, with the popular song writer and lay preacher Tersteegen as the centripetal force of spiritual renewal.

Although theologically well trained, Tersteegen was a tentmaking or self-supporting missionary. Like most Krefeld Mennonites, this Reformed Pietist was a weaver. For many years he sat behind his weaving stool, earning his daily bread. Yet he was always evangelistically active. He preached in Mennonite churches, conducted Bible studies, and demonstrated the meaning of piety, spirituality, and evangelism in daily life. Tersteegen had only one passion--that of helping people in their pursuit of knowing God in a personal way. "I wish from the depth of my heart," he said, "that people would forget the name Tersteegen and that in its place the name of Jesus would be deeply engraved in their hearts."⁵ "Gott ist gegenwärtig," says the chronicler Dirk Cattepoel about Tersteegen, "das war seine gelehrte, gepredigte und gelebte Theologie."⁶

This theology also had its impact on Mennonite Brethren. To this day they sing his song from their worship hymnal:

God Himself is with us: Let us now adore Him,
And with awe appear before Him.
God is in His temple, All within keep silence,

⁴ J. Van den Berg and J. P. Van Dooren, eds., Pietismus und Reveil (Leiden: Brill, 1974), pp. 5, 11-13, 20.

⁵ Quoted by Julius Roessle, Zeugen und Zeugnis: Die Väter des rheinisch-westfälischen Pietismus (Konstanz: Christliche Verlagsanstalt, 1968), p. 47.

⁶ Dirk Cattepoel, "Das religiöse Leben in der Krefelder Mennonitengemeinde des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts," in Beiträge zur Geschichte der rheinischen Mennoniten, ed. Kurt von Beckerath (Weiherhof, Pfaltz: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1958), p. 15.

Prostrate lie with deepest reverence.
Him alone God we own, Him, our God and Saviour;
Praise His Name forever.⁷

The lyrics and other writings of Tersteegen became one of the currents of new life for dry bones of Russian Mennonites.

Lutheran Pietism. There are two groups of Lutheran Pietists. The one under Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705)⁸ and August Hermann Francke (1663-1727)⁹ was centered in Halle, although Spener himself never lived there. Its focus was comprehensive, embracing education, evangelism, social reform, political justice, and crosscultural mission.¹⁰ The other group was concentrated in Württemberg. It too was intensely evangelistic and reformatory, but its theological orientation was colored by apocalyptic speculations which later affected the Mennonites in Russia in no small measure.¹¹

Württemberg Pietism has raised up great men of the Christian church. Best known in Russian Mennonite circles--

⁷ Worship Hymnal (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1979), No. 11, Stanza 1.

⁸ Philip Jacob Spener, Pia Desideria, trans. and ed., with an introduction by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977). Of special importance here is the Introduction, pp. 1-28.

⁹ Erich Beyreuther, August Hermann Francke: Zeuge des lebendigen Gottes, 3rd ed. (Marburg: Francke-Buchhandlung, 1969).

¹⁰ Carl Hinrichs, "Der hallische Pietismus als politische-soziale Reformbewegung des 18. Jahrhunderts," in Jahrbuch für die Geschichte Mittel- und Ostdeutschlands (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1953), vol. 2, pp. 177-189; Arno Lehmann, It Began at Tranquebar, trans. M. J. Lutz (Vepery, Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1956); Wolf Oschlies, Die Arbeits- und Berufspädagogik August Hermann Franckes: Schule und Leben im Menschenbild des Hauptvertreters des Halleschen Pietismus (Witten: Luther-Verlag, 1969).

¹¹ Fred Richard Belk, The Great Trek of the Russian Mennonites to Central Asia, 1880-1884 (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1976), pp. 50, 53ff.; Julius Roessle, Von Bengel bis Blumhardt: Gestalten und Bilder aus der Geschichte des schwabischen Pietismus (Württemberg: Verlag Metzgingen, 1966), pp. 118-139, 247-276, 333-342; Roessle, Zeugen, pp. 118-138.

either through their writings or in person--were Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752),¹² Ludwig Hofacker (1798-1828),¹³ Eduard Hugo Otto Wüst (1818-1859),¹⁴ Heinrich Jung-Stilling (1740-1817),¹⁵ and such well-known lyricists as C. J. Philipp Spitta and Philipp Hiller.¹⁶ All of them made a significant contribution to both the spiritual direction and missionary vision of nineteenth-century Mennonites in Russia--particularly the Mennonite Brethren. Therefore, asks P. M. Friesen, "who of us would wish to deny that this or that member of this group of men was not sent by God to carry out His work of salvation in a time of darkness?"¹⁷ I will return to this question later, especially as it relates to Hiller, Wüst, and Jung-Stilling.

The accomplishments of both types of Lutheran Pietism in terms of spiritual renewal, social reform, and missionary witness were simply phenomenal in their time.¹⁸ A brief note

¹² Roessle, Von Bengel, pp. 64-88.

¹³ Ludwig Hofacker, Predigten für alle Sonn-Fest- und Feiertage nebst einigen Buß- und Bettags-Predigten und Grabreden, 47th ed. (Stuttgart: Steinkopf, 1911), pp. III-LX; cf. Roessle, Von Bengel, pp. 306-323.

¹⁴ Abram Kroeker, Pfarrer Eduard Wüst: Der große Erweckungsprediger in den deutschen Kolonien Südrusslands (Spat bei Sunferopol: Selbstverlag, 1903); Hans Brandenburg, Eduard Wüst (Stuttgart: Evangelischer Missionsverlag, 1955).

¹⁵ See below, pp. 206-210.

¹⁶ Wilhelm Kahle, Aufsätze zur Entwicklung der evangelischen Gemeinden in Russland, oekumenische Studien, vol. 4, ed. Ernst Benz (Leiden/Köln: E. J. Brill, 1962), pp. 158-159.

¹⁷ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 980.

¹⁸ Hans Kasdorf, "The Early Pietists' Wholistic Mission: A Model for Integrating Spiritual Renewal and Social Reform," unpublished manuscript, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 1983, pp. 28-53; cf. August Hermann Francke, Werke in Auswahl, ed. Eberhard Peschke (Berlin: Luther-Verlag, 1969); Hans Leube, "Die Sozialideen des kirchlichen Pietismus," Orthodoxie und Pietismus, ed. Hans Leube (Bielefeld: Luther-Verlag, 1975), pp. 129-152; Martin Gersch, "Gemeinschaft und Sozialgestaltung bei Philip Jakob Spener," in Pietismus und Neuzeit, eds. Martin Brecht et al. (Göttingen: Vandenkoek and Ruprecht, 1979), pp. 302-325; Hans-Werner Gensichen, "Dienst der Seelen und Dienst des Leibes in der frühen pietistischen Mission,"

on their contribution to Bible studies in relationship to Mennonites must suffice here. Lutheran Pietism was instrumental in restoring Bible study meetings, known in academic circles as collegia pietatis. The common folk knew them simply as Stunden. These Stunden became so popular that a whole spiritual movement called Stundisten resulted from them.¹⁹ But contrary to common notion, the Stunden were not invented by the Pietists; they were only recovered and restored by them. Long before Pietism popularized the collegia pietatis in Germany, the Mennonites in Holland were known far and wide as collegiants, meaning those who diligently study the Bible at certain times and places. Before Spener was even born, the Mennonite preacher Hans de Ries (1553-1638) attributed his thorough knowledge of the Bible as preparation for spiritual ministry in the church to this type of intensive Bible study conducted in Mennonite homes and congregations.²⁰

Spener deserves special credit for recovering this important Anabaptist legacy. In his comprehensive program of renewal outlined in Pia Desideria, Spener expressed deep concern over the lack of knowledge of the Word of God among the common people. He recommended radical steps to remedy the situation. One of them was the introduction of the collegia pietatis, a method of Bible study he called "the ancient and apostolic kind of church meetings." Here would not be only one single person expounding or preaching the Word, "but others who have been blessed with gifts and

in Der Pietismus in Gestalten und Wirkungen, eds. Heinrich Bornkamm et al. (Bielefeld: Luther-Verlag, 1975), pp. 155-178.

¹⁹ Waldemar Gutsche, Westliche Quellen des russischen Stundismus (Kassel: Oncken, 1957), pp. 15-42; Johannes Warns, Rußland und das Evangelium: Bilder der evangelischen Bewegung des sogenannten Stundismus (Cassel: J. G. Oncken Nachf., 1920), p. 94f.; Hans Brandenburg, Christen im Schatten der Macht: Die Geschichte des Stundismus in Rußland (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1974), p. 49ff.

²⁰ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 72-73, 33, 208.

knowledge will also speak and present their pious opinions on the proposed subject to the judgment of the rest."²¹ Like the Anabaptists, Spener insisted that the Word of God must be read privately and corporately; it must be listened to and obeyed. It is by no means enough to have knowledge of the Christian faith, he insisted, for "Christianity consists rather of practice."²² Whenever the Word is allowed to do its work, "the diligent exercise of the spiritual priesthood" of the believers will be the inevitable result.²³ Spener had a twofold goal: the "glory of God and the edification of the participants."²⁴

Moravian Pietism. Shortly before his death in 1705, Spener went to visit his four-year-old godchild, Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760),²⁵ later one of the most original and dynamic leaders of the Pietist movement. Spener's visit established a lasting bond between Lutheran and Moravian Pietism.

Next to his conversion, the most profound influence on Zinzendorf was his contact with refugees from Moravia in 1722. These refugees were searching for safety from their persecutors and for a place to live in peace. Like his mother,²⁶ Zinzendorf was moved with compassion and allowed them to found a Christian community on his estate at Berthelsdorf.²⁷ "The church on earth must take risks for

²¹ Spener, Pia Desideria, p. 89.

²² Spener, Pia Desideria, p. 95.

²³ Spener, Pia Desideria, pp. 91-92.

²⁴ Spener, Pia Desideria, p. 90.

²⁵ Hans von Sauberzweig, Er der Meister wir die Brüder (Offenbach: Gnadauer Verlag, 1959), p. 39. The most comprehensive biographical study of Zinzendorf is the 3-volume work by Erich Beyreuther: 1. Der junge Zinzendorf, 1957; 2. Zinzendorf und die sich allhier beisammen finden, 1959; and 3. Zinzendorf und die Christenheit (Marburg: Francke-Buchhandlung, 1961).

²⁶ Beyreuther, Der junge Zinzendorf, pp. 56-61.

²⁷ Von Sauberzweig, Er der Meister, pp. 39-40.

the cause of the gospel," said Zinzendorf.²⁸ He did.

Under his leadership the Moravian Brethren developed a new model of Believers' Church that was given entirely to being a missionary church throughout the world. Zinzendorf's motto, "I have only one passion, and that is He, only He,"²⁹ was contagious. It took hold of the entire movement. Inspired by Hallē Pietism, the Moravians were on the forefront of world mission long before William Carey made his bold move to India in 1792. Within twenty years this small church had organized more mission teams and commissioned more missionaries than the entire Protestant movement in 200 years.³⁰

Like the Mennonites, the Moravians became a people in diaspora.³¹ But unlike the Mennonites, the Moravian diaspora was intentional for the purpose of mission. While the Mennonites to a large extent lost even their missionary dimension, the Moravians sustained both dimension and intention, and thus were able to inspire the Mennonites in Prussia and later also in Russia.³² Zinzendorf's songs and writings were like a breath of fresh air to those who were perceptive to the moving of the Spirit in dry places of the land.

Roman Catholic Pietism. The Pietist revival went far beyond the borders of Reformed and Luthern Protestantism. Many Roman Catholics of Bavaria were equally gripped by the Spirit of God; they became thoroughly converted and began to conduct evangelistic services in Germany, Austria, Finland, and Russia. Leaders of the movement were not only "baptized

²⁸ Beyreuther, Der junge Zinzendorf, p. 57.

²⁹ Gustav Warneck, Abriß einer Geschichte der protestantischen Missionen von der Reformation bis auf die Gegenwart, 7th ed. (Berlin: Martin Warneck, 1901), p. 65.

³⁰ Warneck, Abriß, p. 66.

³¹ Von Sauberzweig, Er der Meister, p. 40.

³² Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 43, 71, 73-74, 98-101, 141f.

with the pietistic spirit,"³³ but were for all practical purposes Pietists at heart and in action.

Martin Boos (1762-1825), the revivalist of Gallneukirchen near Linz,³⁴ Ignaz Lindl, the evangelist of justification by faith in Odessa,³⁵ and Johannes Evangelista Goßner, the writer-preacher with pen in hand and mission at heart,³⁶ rank among the first within the Catholic Pietistic renewal movement. They adopted the Stunde as the most effective method for nurturing believers in their faith, both in Odessa and St. Petersburg. From there the Stunden spread into the villages. Although Lindl and Goßner later became Protestants, they were still Catholics when they evangelized in Russia (1818-1824).³⁷ But their mission activities were forcefully terminated by the authorities, which may be the reason why their influence was extensive rather than lasting.³⁸ When Goßner returned to Germany in 1824, he found a kindred spirit among German Mennonites in Altona and Berlin. These men were leaders of a revival movement which had a profound impact on Mennonite churches in Germany and Russia. They also carried on fellowship with Moravian Pietism and its endeavors in world mission.³⁹

³³ Robert Friedmann, Mennonite Piety through the Centuries: Its Genius and its Literature (Goshen, IN: The Mennonite Historical Society, 1949), p. 7.

³⁴ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 11-12; Brandenburg, Christen, p. 38.

³⁵ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 12-13, 22-27; Brandenburg, Christen, p. 38.

³⁶ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 13-14, 22f.; Brandenburg, Christen, pp. 38-41.

³⁷ Kahle, Aufsätze, p. 139. Kahle's assessment of the work of Lindl and Goßner is less positive than that of Gutsche and Brandenburg.

³⁸ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 26, 24-27; Brandenburg, Christen, pp. 39-42; Kahle, Aufsätze, pp. 138-139.

³⁹ J. Ellenberger, "Johannes Goßner," in Christlicher Gemeindekalendar, published by the Konferenz badisch-pfälzischer Mennoniten (Frankfurt: L. Lichtenberg, 1896), p. 97; Walter Fellmann, "Goßner," Mennonitisches Lexikon, 4 vols.; vols. 1-3 ed. by Christian Hege and Christian Neff

Whenever Pietism of any type has appeared in history, it has challenged the church in various ways. In general, Pietism has served as a channel of renewal in the midst of both orthodox faith without works and meritorious works without faith. In its streams have been found the ingredients of obedience of faith combined with labor of love. And it was this kind of Pietism that sprinkled spiritual freshness on the parched grounds of the Menno tribes in Southern Russia.

Mixing the Fruits

Twentieth-century Mennonite scholarship gives the Anabaptists a much higher rating than the Pietists. Such discrimination is theologically imperative, claims Robert Friedmann, because the external phenomenon may seem to be quite similar while the true essence of the two groups is fundamentally different.⁴⁰ There is little agreement among scholars as to the nature of these differences. But they do agree on one thing, namely that the Pietists had a great impact on Mennonite renewal, particularly on the Mennonite Brethren.

The roots go back to Prussia, the fruits emerged in Russia. Ernst Crous points out that the sociopolitical conditions in Prussia were especially conducive to a "melting pot" of trends and ideas. This made it easy for Pietists and Mennonites to meet on the common ground of biblicism and, to some degree, even on the issue of believers' baptism.⁴¹ He goes on to say that a number of Mennonites who were converted under Pietism in the eighteenth century

(Frankfurt a.M. und Weierhof, 1913, 1916, 1938); vol. 4, ed. by Harold S. Bender and Ernst Crous (Karlsruhe: Heinrich Schneider, 1959), vol. 2, pp. 145-146

⁴⁰ Friedmann, Mennonite Piety, p. 72.

⁴¹ Ernst Crous, "Vom Pietismus bei den altpreußischen Mennoniten im Rahmen ihrer Gesamtgeschichte 1772-1945," Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter, vol. 11, neue Folge No. 6 (1954), 8.

became leading elders in their own congregations.⁴² During the revivals of the earlier part of the nineteenth century, explains Crous,

new winds of the Spirit moved through the land. And as the dead bones in the state church became restless, the Mennonite churches in West Prussia were also revitalized. Leading men emerged among them who testified by their sanctified walk as well as by their active participation in Christian ministries of love that the Spirit of Christ dwelt within them.⁴³

The renewal movement in Prussia became the seedbed of the revival among the Mennonites in Russia a few decades later. This significant historical connection has heretofore been underestimated, if not overlooked. Wilhelm Lange, a converted Lutheran teacher, became a Mennonite elder of Brenkenhofswalde, a congregation with close ties to various Pietist groups. Under Lange's leadership the entire congregation moved to Russia and founded the village Gnadenfeld or "Field of Grace" on the Molotschna in 1835. A year later--that is nine years before Wüst arrived on the scene--the revival was already in full swing,⁴⁴ because the Brenkenhofswalde congregation with its strong infusion of Lutheran and Moravian Pietism had brought the spirit of renewal from Prussia to the Molotschna.

Subsequently, Gnadenfeld not only emerged as a cultural and spiritual center; it also served as a catalyst and facilitator of the greater Mennonite revival on the Russian side when Wüst arrived there in 1845. The intense birth-pangs of Gnadenfeld indicated that new life would be forthcoming. The process of labor continued until the birth was finally completed in 1860. Thus there was a prenatal

⁴² Crous, "Vom Pietismus," p. 15.

⁴³ Quoted by Crous, "Vom Pietismus," p. 15.

⁴⁴ Kroeker, Pfarrer Eduard Wüst, p. 76; Crous, "Vom Pietismus," pp. 16-17; A. Braun, "Die kirchlichen Spaltungen in den rußlanddeutschen Mennonitengemeinden," in Beiträge zur Geschichte der Mennoñiten: Festgabe für D. Christian Neff zum 70. Geburtstag (Weierhof: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1938), pp. 8-9; Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 227-230.

infusion of different theological and ecclesiological Anabaptist and Pietist strands that provided nurture for the renewal movement some years before the Mennonite Brethren stepped onto the historical platform as an independent church in the context of Russian Mennonitism. This lends credibility to Victor Adrian's thesis that the Mennonite Brethren Church was "born of Anabaptism and Pietism."⁴⁵

Hallmarks of Spiritual Renewal

It is always difficult to assess either quantitative or qualitative influences of one movement or another without measurable, scientific data. Yet from the historical records available to us, numerous influences leading to the birth of the Mennonite Brethren Church are evident in qualitative manifestations.

Experiential Faith

The experience of the new birth and the formation of the Believers' Church, as understood by the Evangelical wing of sixteenth-century Anabaptism and by the Mennonite Brethren of the nineteenth century, are mutually inclusive.⁴⁶ One cannot exist for very long without the other. The very nature of the Believers' Church presupposes the centrality of experiential faith of its membership. Therefore, notes J. B. Toews, the Mennonite Brethren before and after 1860 were deeply concerned about "conversion to God through repentance and faith in the reconciling grace in Jesus Christ and the life sanctified according to the rules of the gospel through the gift of grace and Spirit of God."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Victor Adrian, "The Mennonite Brethren Church: Born of Anabaptism and Pietism," insert in the Mennonite Brethren Herald, March 26, 1965.

⁴⁶ Adrian, "Born of Anabaptism and Pietism," p. 8.

⁴⁷ J. B. Toews, "The Significance of P. M. Friesen's History for Mennonite Brethren Self-Understanding," in P. M. Friesen and His History, ed. Abraham Friesen (Fresno: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1979), p. 158.

But this kind of faith is not adequately defined by Luther's principle of sola fide. Nor is it fully described--as many contemporary Evangelicals would argue--in the language of Paul expressed in Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast" (NASB). That is only one side of the coin; the other side is this: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10 NASB). Works without faith are rootless, but faith without works is fruitless. Therefore, experiential faith is not only something that brings people in touch with the realities of Jesus as Savior, it also keeps them in touch with the realities of Christ as Lord.

An early Mennonite Brethren document reinforces the concern for experiential faith coupled with a vision for the Believers' Church. The Brethren emphasized repentance of sin, conversion to God, and the experience of the new birth as a condition for baptism and church membership. Such experience, they maintained, did not rest on a "memorized faith" but rather "on a genuine, loving faith effected by the Spirit of God." Quoting John 3:3, they insisted that people must be born again to become eligible for church membership and the kingdom of God.⁴⁸ These were radical ideas. They were as unpopular within the Mennonite ecclesiopolitical institution of the 1850s in Russia as they had been within Roman Catholicism during the Protestant Reformation or within Orthodox Protestantism during the Pietist revival.

The Brethren recognized that Menno Simons had erected a house "on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, of whom Jesus Christ is the cornerstone." In the course of time, however, this house of Menno wrote P. M. Friesen, had become "nearly empty, cold, and barren." But thanks to men of God, among whom were "evangelical Pietists like Philipp

⁴⁸ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 231.

Hiller, Gerhard Tersteegen, Ludwig Hofacker, Friedrich W. Krummacher as well as many others through their writings, and pastor Wuest personally," there had come "new light, new warmth and new food" into this deserted house.⁴⁹

Through such influences, asserted Friesen, God "is gradually freeing us from the confines of the inherited, one-sided Prussian system," and He will also "protect our congregations from the equally one-sided and therefore unwholesome system of the Dutch Mennonites."⁵⁰ What Friesen meant was the exclusive orthodoxy and narrowness of Mennonite traditionalism in Prussia⁵¹ on the one hand and the inclusive broadmindedness of theological rationalism in Holland on the other.⁵² Neither of these one-sided systems, according to Friesen, showed much evidence of spiritual light, warmth and nurture; nor did either one have much use for conversion and the new birth. But he had great confidence in the liberating influences that had made experiential faith a reality among Russian Mennonites.

Elder Aron Lepp of the Einlage Church, for example, related how he had struggled in his quest for vital faith. First, he sought moral improvement on his own, but to no avail. Then he read Starke's Handbuch, a devotional book, to better his life. That too seemed fruitless. Finally, he went to new converts and listened to their conversion story. "Then I saw the light," Lepp reported. "From then on I sought knowledge and the salvation of my soul and prayed about it to God. And thus it pleased the dear Lord, through the meditation of Hofacker's sermons, to bring about a new creation in me." Lepp exclaimed in Pietist fashion: "O the blessed hours that Jesus provides when one remembers only the wounds of the Lamb!" He added: "It was in 1858 when

⁴⁹ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 47; cf. pp. 34, 37, 48, 53, 900-981.

⁵⁰ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 37-38.

⁵¹ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 92.

⁵² Cf. Friedmann, Mennonite Piety, p. 3.

the great change took place in my heart."⁵³

Similar conversion stories could be repeated many times.⁵⁴ The experience became the norm and the prerequisite for MB membership. Thus the answer to the question, "What makes the right church?" was simple: "A cataclysmic conversion first."⁵⁵

The remarkable parallels both in terms of actual experience and the language used to describe such experience between various Pietists and first generation Mennonite Brethren suggests that their experiential faith had historical and theological models in Pietism.⁵⁶

Songs of the Heart

On September 23, 1860, the Mennonite Brethren of the Molotschna celebrated their first baptismal service by immersion. Instead of singing their Mennonite songs, they chose the Glaubensstimme (voice of faith), the official song book of the German Baptists.⁵⁷ Even more important is the fact that the Glaubensstimme, the Frohe Botschaft (glad tidings) and the Heimatklänge (homeland echoes) made up the

⁵³ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 283-284.

⁵⁴ [Henry E. Reimer], Being Born Again by the Word of God (no p. and p. or d.). The booklet contains a collection of earlier Mennonite Brethren conversion stories from both Russia and North America. For many years the Zionsbote, official MB publication in America (1884-1965), carried conversion stories too numerous to list here.

⁵⁵ Quoted by Friedmann, Mennonite Piety, p. 70; cf. John F. Harms, Die Geschichte der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1924), p. 39.

⁵⁶ Cf. Roessle, Von Bengel; [Reimer], Being Born Again. Roessle records the biographies of great Pietists, including their conversions; Reimer has compiled MB conversion stories. The language of the MBs is strikingly similar to that of the Pietists.

⁵⁷ Braun, "Die kirchlichen Spaltungen," p. 10; cf. Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 287.

famous Dreiband.⁵⁸ This lyrical trilogy has periodically served as the main hymnary of the Mennonite Brethren in Russia and later also in North and South America.⁵⁹

As one journeys through the Dreiband and looks for author and source, the Anabaptist-Mennonite hymns are most conspicuous by their absence. Of a total of 1,079 songs, 748 indicate their origin. Only in two can the Anabaptist derivation be established,⁶⁰ while at least 181 are written by prominent Pietists.⁶¹

Thematically, the songs deal with human sinfulness, redemption through Christ, and the believer's life. Such themes as worship, service, and eschatology are also prominent. Of the relatively few songs listed under the rubric, "The Church of the Lord," nearly one third are written by Zinzendorf, who had a clearer view of the Believers' Church than other Pietists.⁶²

It appears that the songs which the early Mennonite Brethren loved to sing focused more on existential salvation than on ecclesiology. The reason may have been that the institutionalized church, as they had experienced it, seemed less significant at the time of spiritual awakening than the focus on the new life in Christ.

⁵⁸ My copy of the Dreiband contains all three song books under the single title Heimatsklänge, ed. Heinrich Braun, 6th ed. (Neu-Halbstadt: H. J. Braun, 1905). All subsequent references are to this edition.

⁵⁹ I recall from experience that the Dreiband was used extensively in the German-speaking Mennonite Brethren churches in Brazil and Paraguay well into the 1950s. It was also widely used by the Canadian and United States churches during their pioneer years.

⁶⁰ Dreiband, Part 1, No. 233 is by Bernard Harder, and Part 2, No. 464 is taken from an older Mennonitisches Gesangbuch.

⁶¹ The Pietist authorship of the songs identified as such has been verified. Cf. Kahle, Aufsätze, p. 159.

⁶² Nine out of 29 songs dealing with the church are from Zinzendorf's pen. Cf. Dreiband, Part 2, Nos. 385-414.

While describing the subjective and experiential relationship between believers and their God, these songs of the heart did not neglect biblical and theological teachings. The Dreiband, especially the Glaubensstimme, contains many of the older Choräle and other Kernlieder. That is evidenced by the lyrics which focus on the Trinity, worship, holy living, mission, and human hope and destiny.

The same is true of Hiller's Liederkästlein, which was also widely used by the Brethren. This two-volume work was designed for spiritual discipline in a two-year sequence. A Bible pericope, an edifying thought, and a fitting song make up the daily devotions. Hiller divided the 732 devotionals in a trinitarian fashion, giving about equal space to God the Father, to Jesus Christ, and to the Holy Spirit. Under each category he covered all major Christian doctrines from creation to consummation. But central throughout is the Lutheran doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in Christ.⁶³

Fellowship Meetings

Jacob P. Bekker speaks of "great spiritual awakenings" in the 1850s, particularly in Gnadenfeld.⁶⁴ We have already seen that the awakenings had their beginning in 1835, when the colony was founded by the newcomers from Brenkenhofs-walde.⁶⁵ As more and more people were converted, recalls Bekker, meetings for edification and prayer were held in the evenings, resulting in rich blessings. Because believers

⁶³ On the use of songs among the early Mennonite Brethren see Jacob P. Bekker, Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church, trans. by D. E. Pauls and A. E. Janzen (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1973), p. 94. Friedrich Hiller wrote his Liederkästlein (vol. 1, 1762; vol. 2, 1767) while pastor in Steinheim. My copy is a later edition (Reutlingen: Kurtz'sche Buchhandlung, 1880).

⁶⁴ Bekker, Origin, p. 25.

⁶⁵ Kahle, Aufsätze, p. 162; cf. Kroeker, Pfarrer Eduard Wüst, p. 76.

met frequently and not only on Sundays, their opponents labeled them Stundengänger or "meeting goers."⁶⁶ Soon these Stundengänger agreed to convene brotherhood conferences on Saturday afternoons during full moon so that people from other villages could drive home in the moonlight. Eduard Wüst, the driving force behind these meetings, was supported by a few Mennonite leaders. Newly converted Mennonites began to learn the meaning of spiritual discipline and of spontaneity in expressing their faith practices from which the larger Mennonite body had departed long ago.⁶⁷

These Saturday meetings were designed for the following purpose: (a) to strengthen each other in the faith; (b) to admonish one another in Christian conduct; (c) to care for one another in the body of Christ; and (d) to learn to know one another in one's human depravity and Christ in his boundless love. "Oh, these were often blessed afternoon hours," wrote Jakob Reimer, "during which our hearts were filled with Jesus' love and we were fused together in him."⁶⁸

Corporate worship took on new meaning, sometimes approaching a mystical experience as expressed in hymns like these:

O that my heart an altar were
Of incense and of praise,
Where thanks and honor to the Lamb
My soul might ever raise!

The knowledge of this Lamb sublime
Has banished doubts away;
Because my faith is placed in Him,
I fear no Judgement Day.

The debt of sin has now been paid,
'Tis covered by the blood!
And God has no remembrance made
Since came the cleansing flood!

⁶⁶ Bekker, Origin, p. 25; cf. Kahle, Aufsätze, pp. 163, 202.

⁶⁷ Bekker, Origin, pp. 25-26.

⁶⁸ Quoted by Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 206-207.

My heart is glad, I now rejoice,
 To find such peaceful ways!
 Thus ever shall I lift my voice
 In my Redeemer's Praise!⁶⁹

Birth of the Mennonite Brethren Church

The secession of the Mennonite Brethren from the larger Mennonite Church in Russia on January 6, 1860, has been one of the most severely criticized events in Mennonite history and an issue of fragile relationships between the two groups. Neither group, however, can either claim innocence or place blame at the other's door. But those tensions and conflicts have been dealt with at length by historians and critics alike and need not occupy us here.⁷⁰ The question at this point relates to external forces and internal developments within Mennonitism prior to the emergence of the Mennonite Brethren.

Winds of Change and Challenge

The spiritual awakening among Russian Mennonites which eventually gave birth to the Mennonite Brethren cannot be understood without reference to winds of change from all directions prior to 1860.⁷¹ Several concrete examples of the stirring winds of God in the valley of dry bones merit notice.

Withdrawal of the Kleine Gemeinde.⁷² This Minority Church had evolved in the Molotschna between 1812 and 1819

⁶⁹ Worship Hymnal, no. 345; cf. Dreiband, Part II, no. 210.

⁷⁰ Cf. Braun, "Die kirchlichen Spaltungen," pp. 7-8; Friedmann, Mennonite Piety, pp. 70-72; A. H. Unruh, Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, Ltd., 1955), pp. 17-22.

⁷¹ A. J. Klassen, "The Roots and Development of Mennonite Brethren Theology to 1914," unpublished M.A. thesis (Wheaton College Graduate School, 1966), p. 33.

⁷² There is no dynamic equivalent in English for what the German designation Kleine Gemeinde has stood for in history. The literal rendering of "small church" or "little church" would be totally inadequate. Therefore, I have chosen the term "Minority Church." That is precisely what it was until 1962 when it changed its name in Canada to

under the leadership of the Flemish Mennonite preacher Klaas Reimer (1770-1837).⁷³ It was both a renewal and protest movement. The revival began in prayer groups and led to Bible studies in private homes.⁷⁴ The members faulted the larger church for laxity in church discipline; they objected to "the use of force in punishing evildoers in the Mennonite community";⁷⁵ they protested against cultural innovations undertaken in the name of progress;⁷⁶ they condemned the use of musical instruments in worship; and, paradoxically, they resisted participation in mission work. At the same time, they were devout and pious people, willing to walk the second mile according to the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5:39-41.⁷⁷

Historians vary in their assessment of the Kleine Gemeinde. There are those who point out that Reimer himself, although a sincerely pious soul, "was devoid of any joyous knowledge of God's grace" and that he was educationally and culturally "indescribably narrow."⁷⁸ Others believe that the Kleine Gemeinde possessed genuine spiritual life that would

Evangelical Mennonite Church. See Harold S. Bender, "Kleine Gemeinde" in Mennonite Encyclopedia, 4 vols., ed. Harold S. Bender et al. (Scottsdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1955-1959), vol. 3, pp. 196-199.

⁷³ Christian Neff, "Reimer, Klaas," in Mennonitisches Lexikon, vol. 3, p. 455.

⁷⁴ John H. Lohrenz, The Mennonite Brethren Church (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1950), p. 24.

⁷⁵ J. A. Toews, A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975), p. 25.

⁷⁶ Braun, "Die kirchlichen Spaltungen," pp. 7-8; Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 93-94; Heinrich Balzer, "Faith and Reason: The Principles of Mennonitism Reconsidered, in a Treatise of 1833," trans. and ed. by Robert Friedmann, Mennonite Quarterly Review 22 (1948), 75-93.

⁷⁷ Bender, "Kleine Gemeinde," p. 197; N. N., "Kurzer Beitrag zur Geschichte der Molotschnaer Mennoniten," Christlicher Familienkalender für das Jahr 1900, ed. A. Kroeker (Odessa: A. Schultze, 1899), p. 110.

⁷⁸ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 93.

have found a warm response among the early Mennonite Brethren.⁷⁹ An essay on Verstand und Vernunft⁸⁰ by Heinrich Balzer, a first-generation member of this church, provides the basis for the positive assessment. Along with Reimer, Balzer was wary of the conditions in the Mennonite Church, warned of impending dangers, and called for a return to the Scriptures. Although its impact remained marginal,⁸¹ the Minority Church acted as a barometer by pointing out that not all was well in the larger church, thus preparing the way for the Mennonite Brethren.

Intellectual Renaissance of Ohrloff. In 1820, the Mennonites of the Molotschna established the famous but short-lived Vereinsschule under the sponsorship of the Ohrloff School Society headed by Johann Cornies. In 1822, at the time Lindl and Goßner were still evangelizing in Russia, the education committee imported Tobias Voth, a well-known Christian educator of the Brenkenhofswalde congregation in Prussia, to assume directorship of the new school.

Voth was committed to Christian education with a decided emphasis on "Christian." While still in Prussia, he had experienced conversion while reading the Bible Stories by Jung-Stilling in a family setting. He describes the event as follows:

When I read the story of Jesus' suffering, I was touched by the grace of Jesus, and my wife and sister-in-law as well. We received mercy, and the Savior revealed Himself to us as the One who blots out sin, and as a friend. A blessed, unforgettable time!⁸²

Voth's philosophy of education went beyond the expectations of the renaissance. His vision was to integrate the intellectual and cultural with the ethical and spiritual

⁷⁹ Toews, History, p. 27.

⁸⁰ Balzer, "Faith and Reason," p. 75.

⁸¹ Balzer, "Faith and Reason," p. 80.

⁸² Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 690.

principles of the Christian life. From the beginning, Voth had great success as a teacher. His innovative teaching methods attracted many students to the school.⁸³ Beyond his influence in the classroom, Voth made a fourfold contribution towards renewal and change: (a) he introduced prayer meetings where people learned to say free prayers that were neither memorized nor read; (b) he organized a Christian Literary Society to promote reading and disseminate good literature; (c) he sponsored Missionsstunden, which I will discuss more fully later; and (d) he raised up a number of disciples who became the leaders of renewal in the church.⁸⁴ But that was more than nominal Mennonites could tolerate at the time.

Reflecting on Voth's contributions, P.M. Friesen wrote:

Tobias Voth was the first among us in Russia to put into practice what we today call "brotherhood," a warmhearted Christian fellowship, something that is now found in the M.B. Church as well as in all truly vital Christian circles of the "old" or Mennonite Church.⁸⁵

Powerful preaching of Wüst. According to J. A. Toews, Wüst's preaching was "one of the greatest influences contributing to the religious awakening among Mennonites in Russia."⁸⁶ In fact, it reignited the revival fires which the Brenkenshofswalde group had set aflame a decade prior to Wüst's arrival.

Wüst was a true son of Württemberg Pietism,⁸⁷ strongly influenced by Gottlieb Wilhelm Hoffmann (1771-1846), founder of the Separatist (Lutheran) Brüdergemeinde of Korntal near Stuttgart, and the architect of the millenarian Jerusalem-Movement.⁸⁸ Shortly before Hoffmann's death, Wüst accepted

⁸³ Toews, History, pp. 27-28.

⁸⁴ Bekker, Origin, p. 32; Toews, History, p. 27.

⁸⁵ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 97.

⁸⁶ Toews, History, p. 29.

⁸⁷ Brandenburg, Eduard Wüst, pp. 7-8.

⁸⁸ Roessle, Von Bengel, pp. 333-344.

the call to pastor the Separatist Church in Neuhoftnung, a village near the city of Berdjansk by the Sea of Azov, about forty kilometers southeast of the Molotschna colony in South Russia.⁸⁹

On September 28, 1845, Wüst preached his famous Inaugural Sermon.⁹⁰ His pericope was Isaiah 40:6-8:

A voice says, "Cry!"
And I said, "What shall I cry?"
All flesh is grass, and all its beauty
is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
surely the people is grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand forever. (RSV)

In his application of the text, Wüst focused on the either-or axiom. "A total Savior as over against a total sinner, that is the great exchange that can be transacted." Then he added:

Therefore, beloved, in my very first sermon, I send out to you this call: either--or. Either a believer or an unbeliever; either converted or unconverted; either a natural man or a regenerate man; either a sheep or a goat; either on the right or on the left; either the straight gate, the narrow way or the wide gate and the broad way; either flesh or Spirit; either God or mammon; either Christ or Belial; either blessing or curse; either life or death; either salvation or condemnation; either heaven or hell! There is no third! This choice I will continually place before you, neither will I permit you to remain together, believer and unbeliever, but you shall become separated according to the words of Paul in II Cor. 6:14.⁹¹

The call to both is clear: an uncompromising commitment to Christ, and a decisive separation from unbelievers. The first was realized, but not the second. Like Luther, Wüst "found

⁸⁹ Brandenburg, Eduard Wüst, pp. 8-10.

⁹⁰ The text of the sermon was printed by the University Press in Moscow (1850) and has been incorporated as Document No. 46 (2) in P. M. Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 213-223. For a historical reflection on the text see Abram Kröker, "Wüsts Antrittspredigt und die Erweckung unter den Separatisten," Christlicher Familienkalender für das Jahr 1908 (Halbstadt, Russia: Verlag von J. H. Braun, 1907), pp. 91-99.

⁹¹ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 221.

it impossible to bring his original vision into actual realization."⁹² Believers and unbelievers remained side by side in his congregation.

The central theme of the sermon is "Jesus Christ, the Crucified One." This is explicitly mentioned nineteen times, and implicitly many more times throughout the sermon. But, interestingly, no mention is made of the resurrection of Christ. While the strong focus on the cross and on Jesus as Savior seems to be imbalanced, it can be justified on the grounds that this was precisely a much neglected emphasis, particularly in Mennonite circles where the call to salvation through the vicarious death of Jesus on the cross had virtually become unknown.

Elder Abraham Matthies of Rudnerweide was the first Mennonite to hear Wüst preach. He was so impressed by the Inaugural Sermon in Neuhoftnung that he invited the Lutheran preacher to Gnadenfeld. When Wüst came in 1846, the low-burning revival light was rekindled into a bright flame that kept on burning until 1860.⁹³

Rays of light from Gnadenfeld. Gnadenfeld was the privileged recipient of the spiritual legacy of Lutheran and Moravian Pietism which had already nurtured its members in Brenkenhofswalde through the Stunde, weekly prayer meetings, and mission festivals. This congregation of pioneers from Prussia was less than twelve years old when Wüst began to preach in Russia. Yet the role it was to play both in the renewal movement and in missionary motivation (as I will show below) was far-reaching and profound. From Gnadenfeld the rays of light dispelled deep darkness, gloom, and night.

First, Gnadenfeld was the Empfängnisstätte of the Mennonite Brethren Church.⁹⁴ Embryonic development and birth of the Brethren are unthinkable without the spiritual

⁹² Toews, History, p. 31.

⁹³ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 34-35.

⁹⁴ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 98-99; Toews, History, pp. 29-30; Lohrenz, Mennonite Brethren Church, p. 24.

and cultural womb which Gnadenfeld provided from 1835 to 1860.⁹⁵

Second, Gnadenfeld possessed moral and spiritual qualities that were rare in those days. This became especially evident in 1849 when the congregation had to discipline its own elder, Friedrich Lange, because of a moral lapse. The power to discipline a member was not lodged in a single person or in the civil court, but in corporate congregational action.

Third, the church council was actively involved in social issues, particularly those related to misuse of alcohol. Early in its history it had formed a Temperance Union, denounced consumption of liquor among the Mennonites and produced literature to inform people of the consequences.⁹⁶

Fourth, the members fully cooperated with their elder August Lenzmann (1823-1877) from Brenkenhofswalde in establishing the famous Bruderschule. This brotherhood school--like the teaching of Tobias Voth several decades earlier--was based on Christian principles and patterned after the ideals of Wichern's Rauhes Haus of Hamburg. The purpose was to foster a spirit of advanced Christian education among the Mennonites.⁹⁷

Fifth, the believers of Gnadenfeld called themselves "brothers" and "sisters" long before the Mennonite Brethren Church was born. This was a distinctive of Pietism from the time of Spener and Francke, when all Pietists addressed one another in such fraternal terms.

Finally, the Gnadenfeld members had a friend and supporter in Elder Lenzmann, who initially stood clearly on the side of the renewal movement. During the birthing

⁹⁵ Toews, History, p. 29.

⁹⁶ Toews, History, p. 28.

⁹⁷ Toews, History, p. 29; cf. Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 105-107; J. H. Wichern, Die innere Mission der deutschen evangelischen Kirche, 2nd ed. (Hamburg: Agentur des Rauhen Hauses, 1933), p. 122.

crisis, however, Lenzmann decided to stay with the institution and allowed the radical movement to walk a separate path.

The Breaking Point

Now that the elder had abandoned the renewal movement the onus of further decisions lay with the Brethren. They faced hard decisions that could have far-reaching consequences. But the wheels had begun rolling and could not be stopped.

The communion issue. The most troubling issue for the Brethren was separation of believers from unbelievers, especially at the time of the Lord's Supper. Could they sit together at the communion table breaking bread with nonbelievers? In their search for clarity on this issue, several things developed which led to a break with the established church and to the birth of the Mennonite Brethren movement.

First, the Brethren absented themselves from communion services in the official church. The new converts of the Lutheran Separatist Church of Neuhoftnung had done so before them; they had refused to take the Lord's Supper administered by Pastor Wüst on grounds that Wüst preached separation, but did not practice it in that he allowed openly declared unbelievers to participate.⁹⁸ The example of the Separatists led some Mennonites to separate themselves from the larger body.

Second, they began to celebrate the Lord's Supper in an ecumenical spirit with believers from various Lutheran, Separatist, and Mennonite churches. But this practice was discontinued when Lenzmann became elder of Gnadenfeld in 1854.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ There is a conflicting report on this point. Gutsche states that "Wüst ließ zum Abendmahl nur Wiedergeborene zu" (Westliche Quellen, p. 36). Bekker claims that Wüst was afraid of losing members and therefore admitted unconverted members to the communion table (Origin, pp. 27-29).

⁹⁹ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 227-228.

Third, they experienced rejection by their leaders. Following discontinuation of open communion, the Brethren asked Lenzmann to celebrate the Lord's Supper more often with them separately from the official church, "even if this had to be done here and there in the homes, as they did in the Acts of the Apostles 2:46-47."¹⁰⁰ The elder denied the request.

Finally, they observed private communion without an elder present. In the fall of 1859, several men and women from Gnadenfeld and Elisabeththal had gathered in the home of Kornelius Wiens, where they broke bread together. The authorities were outraged. Some participants were excommunicated from the church and ostracized, to their economical ruin, by the Gebietsamt.¹⁰¹ Others were called before the ministers and forced to give account of their actions, although those from Gnadenfeld were treated with a measure of toleration. Yet the damage was done and the breach irreparable. When the Brethren left the church, "Gnadenfeld had ceased to be the center of the Brotherhood Movement."¹⁰²

Completing the birth. The harsh treatment which the Brethren had received at the hands of Mennonite leaders, and the continued threats from ecclesiastical and civil authorities for observing the Lord's supper in a private home were seen as sufficient cause for separation from the larger Mennonite Church. Therefore, on Epiphany Day, January 6, 1860, eighteen heads of families from the Brethren gathered at the home of Isaak Koop in the village Elisabeththal of the Molotschna Colony. Upon special request, Abraham Cornelissen had drafted a document for the occasion. They studied the paper, prayed over it, then signed and together with a cover

¹⁰⁰ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 228-229.

¹⁰¹ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 229. Bekker reports that some of the Brethren escaped and were told by the elder that "the thing they had done was a criminal offense which, if brought to the civil [Russian] authorities, would subject them to the penalty of death" (Origin, p. 39).

¹⁰² Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 229.

letter submitted it as the official Document of Secession "To the total body of church elders of our Molotschna Church."¹⁰³ With that act of secession was born the Mennonite Brethren Church. But its struggle for survival and legal recognition was long and hard.¹⁰⁴

The Chortitza renewal. For the sake of historical accuracy it must be noted that the winds of God did not bypass the Mennonites in Chortitza, known as Old Colony. There, too, was a revival leading to new life in the church. But these winds came from another direction. Abraham Unger of Einlage and others had been reading Das Missionsblatt der Gemeinde getaufter Christen, published by Johann Gerhard Oncken (1800-1884), founder of the German Baptists.¹⁰⁵ Subsequently, Unger corresponded with Oncken. Thus in its early years, the Einlage group received strong impulses from Germany. But Gnadenfeld and Einlage soon found each other and pursued their common goal as one Mennonite Brethren Church.

Examining the Birth Certificate

The Document of Secession is the denominational birth certificate. Assessment of its validity is imperative.

Reasons for separation. In the Document, the Brethren give their reasons for secession: (a) respect for God and personal integrity of conscience; (b) fear of God's inevitable judgment because of church corruption; (c) fear of loss of privileges due to increasing disobedience on the part of Mennonites towards the government; (d) shame to be identified with those who "live satanic lives" in public places; (e) impotence of church leaders to deal with godless

¹⁰³ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 230.

¹⁰⁴ See Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 233-278; Toews, History, pp. 38-50.

¹⁰⁵ Oncken's paper was initially called Missionsblatt (1844-1848). Thereafter it appeared as Das Missionsblatt der Gemeinden getaufter Christen.

members; and (f) resolve "to be innocent of the souls of the erring."¹⁰⁶

Strengths and weaknesses. The Document contains both positive and negative aspects which are variously interpreted.

First, the Document is sometimes seen as a confession of faith.¹⁰⁷ But that is hardly valid. While the Document does point out doctrinal issues of circumstantial relevance, the tone as a whole is not creedal.

Second, the Document is said to be too general and sweeping in its accusations against the decadent churches and "spiritually blind" leaders. Surely, there was much decay in dry bones, but not all ecclesiastical bones were dry. The revival had produced great leaders of whom some decided to stay in the Old Church.¹⁰⁸

Third, the Document can be regarded as the rationale for secession: at the given time and under prevailing conditions it offered adequate explanations why the Brethren felt compelled to leave. Even if the charges were too general, they were never publicly refuted by the church body, and thus legitimate.¹⁰⁹

Fourth, it is rightly observed that the Document makes only implicit statements about the mission of the church. The Brethren prayed for other Mennonites "that they shall be saved"; they stated that only those "genuinely converted to Christ" can become church members; and they asked the Lord to equip faithful living witnesses who will direct His children and the work of His hand to Him.¹¹⁰

Finally, it may be noted that the Brethren made it clear that they intended to return to the Scriptures and

¹⁰⁶ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 230-231.

¹⁰⁷ Braun, "Die kirchlichen Spaltungen," p. 9.

¹⁰⁸ Toews, History, p. 36; G. W. Peters, The Growth of Foreign Missions in the Mennonite Brethren Church (Hillsboro, KS: M.B. Publishing House, 1947), pp. 31-32.

¹⁰⁹ Toews, History, pp. 36-37.

¹¹⁰ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 231.

the teachings of their Anabaptist forefathers, especially those of Menno Simons.¹¹¹

Validity in context. The final issue is apologetic in nature. The tension between the Old Church or Kirchengemeinde and New Church or Brüdergemeinde has been less than creative for a hundred years.¹¹² Thus the question whether the birth was legitimate or illegitimate is a valid one.¹¹³ Scholars from both camps have looked at it from all sides. Despite strong negative reactions by some, arguments in support of separation are overwhelming.¹¹⁴

1. The ecclesiastical context. The Mennonites in Russia had lost the biblical church view for which their Anabaptist forefathers had laid down their lives. Instead, they had become absorbed in the affairs of the "corpus christianum in which membership was acquired by [biological] birth and all social, economic or religious privileges were enjoyed by virtue of membership in the [socioethnic] group."¹¹⁵ The secession of the Mennonite Brethren was an attempt to reverse the status quo. Even if they physically remained within the sociocultural structure, spiritually they did return to the principles of the Believers' Church based on New Testament teaching. They rediscovered, as it were, the vision for a free and missionary church in the world, but radically different from the world.

¹¹¹ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 232.

¹¹² J. A. Toews has depicted the early years of conflict and opposition as a time of "Storm and Stress," History, pp. 38-50; see also the documents in Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 233-284.

¹¹³ Toews, History, pp. 51-68; Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 262-273 and his "documents," #181-195, pp. 416-448.

¹¹⁴ C. Henry Smith, Smith's Story of the Mennonites, 5th ed., rev. and enlarged by Cornelius Krahn (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1981), pp. 277-282; Braun, "Die kirchlichen Spaltungen," pp. 7-18; C. J. Dyck, "1525 Revisited?" in Pilgrims and Strangers, ed. Paul Toews (Fresno, CA: Center for MB Studies, 1977), pp. 55-77.

¹¹⁵ Dyck, "1525 Revisited?" p. 63.

2. The psychological context. This is a question of self-image and self-assessment. The Mennonites in Russia had exchanged their identity from Christian brotherhood to ethnic peoplehood. The Mennonite Brethren regained theirs by recovering their spiritual legacy, particularly the Scriptures and the writings of Menno Simons. When they were accused of being a sectarian movement and, therefore, illegal aliens without a religious identity in the land, they explained:

We are not a newly-established sect, as the worthy Supervisory Commission likes to call us. On the contrary, we are the seed of the imperishable Word of God, which was preached to us by the Apostles, explained through the Holy Spirit, and have become a fruit of the living faith of our beloved founder (Stammvater) Menno Simons, who in all his church regulations and confessions of faith practiced and established them even as we; hence we can rightly call ourselves the genuine descendants of true Mennonitism.¹¹⁶

Their identity as true Mennonites was based upon rebirth, not natural birth. Therein lay event-character and a new sense of mutual responsibility. Their new solidarity as a people of God was anchored in the Mennonite past and connected to a strong raison d'etre for present and future.

3. The historical context. The historical argument for the justification of the secession can be put forth on three levels. The first level is based on the understanding of history by the dissidents themselves. When Johann Claassen and Abraham Cornelissen sought counsel from Nikolai Schmidt, a Templar sympathizer and minister in Gnadenfeld, Schmidt responded

that if it was a matter of conscience on their part which kept them from taking communion with the unrepentant, and that if they could no longer condone the decadent condition of the church, he knew of no other course to recommend than for the believers to withdraw. For, said he, wherever separation has taken place, it

¹¹⁶ Quoted by J. A. Toews, History, pp. 363-364; Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 245.

was not the unbelieving and unconverted who has drawn back. The believers must make the first move.

The two men found this advice acceptable and shared it with those of like mind in Elisabethtal.¹¹⁷

The second level is reflected by a historical moment in the life of the infant congregation which the Brethren interpreted as having the favor of God on their side.

Less than five months after the secession, the Brethren appointed two brothers, Heinrich Hübner of Liebenau and Jakob Bekker of Rudnerweide, to the preaching and teaching ministry of the Word. They accepted these men "as their ministers from the hand of the Lord."¹¹⁸

The third level was marked by growth and expansion. Onward from that historical event of appointing their own ministers, the movement marked a healthy and consistent growth pattern. "Thus, while the Mennonite Brethren Church comprised only 4.3 per cent of the total Mennonite population in Russia in 1888, they had grown to include 22.5 per cent by 1925."¹¹⁹

4. The missionary context. The Mennonites had become "a people without a missionary spirit."¹²⁰ But with the founding of the Mennonite Brethren in 1860, notes G. H. Lohrenz, there emerged a new and vigorous church with a deep sense of mission. "Whereas the old church had lost most of its zeal and contented itself with peaceful coexistence, the new church soon found ways of implementing the Great Commission."¹²¹ Like the Anabaptists over 300 years earlier, the Mennonite Brethren were born in a revival movement which issued into a dynamic missionary movement. Subsequently, they crossed all levels of mission frontiers: they went to the unconverted Mennonites, to the German-speaking colonists

¹¹⁷ Bekker, Origin, p. 41.

¹¹⁸ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 243.

¹¹⁹ Peters, Growth, p. 37.

¹²⁰ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 34.

¹²¹ Gerhard Lohrenz, "The Mennonites of Russia and the Great Commission," in A Legacy of Faith, ed. C. J. Dyck (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1962), p. 183.

in Russia, to the Russian peoples, and to tribes and nations beyond the Russian borders. The excitement of a new meaning in life through Christian conversion became an irrepressible motive to share that life with others, as I will show in the next chapter.

5. The confessional context. P. M. Friesen contends that the Mennonite Brethren represented a unique confluence of Mennonites, Pietists, and Baptists.¹²²

First, they were Mennonite in their understanding of the New Testament model of the Believers' Church, the Lord's Supper, separation of believers and unbelievers, and the calling to the ministry. In each instance they based their conviction on Simons' Fundamentbuch, which they had in their possession.

Second, they were Pietist in some of their theological convictions. The Pietists had called the Brethren back to the Bible and to a life of personal and corporate piety and holy living. From the Pietists they also received the concept of repentance, conversion, assurance of salvation, and the vision for mission. Wüst had injected these ideas so deeply into their spiritual and mental bloodstream that Friesen calls him the "second reformer" of the Mennonite Brethren Church, Menno Simons being the first.¹²³

Third, they were also influenced by the Baptists. In Einlage, for instance, the question of believers' baptism by immersion did not come from either Simons¹²⁴ or Wüst, but

¹²² Cf. Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 47, 980-981, 231-232; cf. Menno Simons, The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, c. 1496-1561, trans. by Leonard Verduin and ed. by John C. Wenger (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1974), pp. 103-230.

¹²³ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 211; cf. Peters, Growth, p. 39.

¹²⁴ Bekker reports in Origin (p. 72) that Menno Simons in the Fundamentbuch taught baptism "in unbeschwertem Wasser," and took this as sufficient evidence to defend the practice of immersion in court.

from Baptist literature.¹²⁵ The Baptists also shaped their view of church polity and structure. Oncken himself and one of his best tentmaking missionaries, August Liebig,¹²⁶ left indelible marks on the Brethren.

6. The theological context. As important as the foregoing ruminations with regard to the various contexts may have been, the real theology of the Brethren was unequivocally enunciated in the Document of Secession anchored in the Scriptures and in Menno Simon's Foundation of Christian Doctrine.¹²⁷ Five issues were uppermost in their minds at the time of secession.

First, faith must be effected by the Spirit of God as a condition for believers' baptism. Without faith, they stated, it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6), and those who do not have Christ's Spirit are not God's own (Rom. 8:9). To be God's people means to be people of the

¹²⁵ At least four Baptist sources on the question of believers' baptism by immersion were available to the Brethren: (1) Das Missionsblatt der Gemeinden getaufter Christen was read by Unger and others in Einlage. It dealt specifically with the baptism question. (2) There were those who read Anna Judsons Memoiren. Mrs. Judson was herself baptized by William Carey when she came to India. (3) Johann Claassen, one of the eighteen founding fathers, secured a book on immersion from the Baptists in St. Petersburg and brought it to Gnadenfeld. (4) Mennonite Brethren also received writings by Spurgeon from the Lutherans of Old and New Danzig in the Ukraine. Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 35-37; Bekker, Origin, pp. 69-72.

¹²⁶ Liebig came to Chortitza in early spring of 1866, where he helped in the organization of the new MB Church. But he was soon jailed by (through) the Mennonite authorities and subsequently extradited as an "undesirable subject." He wrote to Oncken from the Odessa jail, June 2, 1866: "Mennoniten . . . haben mich in die Hände der Obrigkeit geliefert. Überhaupt waren es Mennoniten, die in jüngster Zeit Brüder aus ihrer Mitte, die neu belebt wurden, ins Gefängnis brachten. O daß der Herr ihnen Rußlands Privilegien nehmen wollte, damit ihnen wieder Gottes Privilegium werde, Sünder zu Christus zu führen" (Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 37).

¹²⁷ The theology of the Brethren is found in sections d) to i) of the Document of Secession in Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 230-232.

Kingdom which, according to the teachings of Jesus, requires the new birth (Jn. 3:3). Baptism, however, "is not the new birth, as some of the unconverted maintain"; it is only a sign for the baptismal candidate that he or she is born by the Spirit of God.

Second, communion reminds the believers "of their mighty salvation through the death of the Lord Jesus." Thus it serves as a "sign of intimate union with Jesus, their Savior" (I Cor. 10:16) and of "covenant and fellowship of believers" (I Cor. 10:17). But it is not "a sign of the fellowship of believers and unbelievers" as was practiced in the institutional church. Since many of those who were called "brother" lived in covetousness, blasphemed the name of God, and were "almost continually under the influence of liquor," the Brethren refused to share the Lord's Supper with them and felt compelled to separate themselves from them (I Cor. 10:20-21; Mt. 6:24; Rev. 8:14; II Cor. 6).

Third, footwashing was instituted by the Lord Jesus (Jn. 13). Therefore, it ought to be practiced, "for the blessing is in the deed, not in the knowledge." Their stress of footwashing compelled the Brethren to add a separate article about this practice in the Confession of Faith which Elder Abraham Unger of Einlage adopted from the Baptists in 1872.¹²⁸

Fourth, according to the Scriptures, ministers may be called and appointed in two ways. Some are chosen by God alone and even sent out by the Holy Spirit. The Old Testament prophets and the apostles in the New Testament are a case in point (Acts 9 and 13; I Cor. 15:16; I Tim. 3). Others are called through human instrumentality (Acts 1:15-26; 6:1-6; 15; 22f.).

This became a crucial issue in early MB history when on June 2, 1860, the Brethren elected Hübert and Bekker as

¹²⁸ Glaubens-Bekenntnis und Verfassung der gläubig-
getauften und vereinigten Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde im
südlichen Rußland (Einlage: A. Unger, 1876). See footnote
223 in this chapter.

their first ministers.¹²⁹ The entire Council of Elders was invited for June 5, to confirm this action and "to invoke the blessing of our God and Lord . . . upon our ministers."¹³⁰ But none of the elders came. Later, however (December 15, 1864), the Council sent a lengthy statement to the secular government, declaring that the Mennonite Brethren had "neither a church-ordained elder nor a properly appointed minister." Therefore, the Council argued, "according to the rules of our church, we can neither condone nor recognize as legal such unauthorized practices of theirs as baptism, communion and marriage."¹³¹ It may be noted that the Brethren based their action on Scripture, whereas the Council of Elders based theirs on church tradition.

Finally, with regard to church discipline the Brethren stated "that all carnal and reprobate sinners must be banned from the fellowship of believers" (II Thess. 3:14-15). However, the church must be open, ready to forgive, receive into fellowship every sinner who repents,¹³² and sustain the "joy to lead disconsolate souls to Christ."¹³³

Struggle for Survival

The cradle of the newborn church was rocked by a hostile environment. At times, material and psychological assaults by various external and internal storms and stresses were so severe that the life of its young occupant was in grave jeopardy. The situation was one of tension and conflict in which impetuous action of one side led to even greater

¹²⁹ Cf. Friesen, Brotherhood, documents #95, p. 242, and #157, pp. 343-344.

¹³⁰ Friesen, Brotherhood, document #95, p. 242.

¹³¹ Friesen, Brotherhood, document #108, p. 256. If the government had accepted this declaration by the Council of Elders, the Mennonite Brethren would have become economic, religious, and social outcasts.

¹³² Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 232.

¹³³ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 240.

reaction of the other until the disagreement had widened to a yawning chasm of irreconcilable proportion.

Storms from Without

The New Church was treated as an unwanted child by the Old Church and rejected by most of its siblings. The civil and ecclesiastical Mennonite hierarchy, in conjunction with some initial support from the Russian government, took a series of measures against the secessionists. Such impositions as court hearings, imprisonments, threats of excommunication, economic sanctions and banishment to Siberia were frequent.¹³⁴ In their distress, the Brethren made an appeal to the "Most Serene Monarch" for protection in the exercise of their "evangelical worship and for the cessation of the severe persecutions on the part of the local government administration, in order to be able to live a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and sobriety."¹³⁵

The Council of Elders was divided within itself as to means and methods of dealing with the secessionists. On the one hand, there was the "Majority Report"¹³⁶ of March 11, 1860, written and signed by five of the eight elders in the Council.¹³⁷ It contained three major charges: (a) one-sided interpretation and application of certain passages of the Holy Scriptures by which the Mennonite Brethren close themselves "to any kind of correction and instruction"; (b) disrespect for the existing church order on grounds "that one must obey God rather than man"; (c) an "outrageous presumption and delusion" by regarding only

¹³⁴ Bekker, Origin, pp. 73-86.

¹³⁵ Friesen, Brotherhood, document #143, p. 319.

¹³⁶ Friesen, Brotherhood, document #170, pp. 384-393; cf. Bekker, Origin, document #8, pp. 55, 57; Harms, Geschichte, pp. 10-11; Toews, History, pp. 40-42.

¹³⁷ Pastor Dobert of Prischib, an influential Lutheran churchman, responded to the document of the five elders and called it a testimonium pauperitas. Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 233.

themselves to be true Christians and declaring the "entire Mennonite Brotherhood to be so decadent as to have totally become the slave of the devil."¹³⁸ The Brethren responded to and denied these charges.¹³⁹

On the other hand, there was the "Minority Report"¹⁴⁰ submitted in the form of letters by the other three elders of the Council who had not signed the official document. The venerated Elder Bernard Fast of Ohrloff, Molotschna's mother church, Elder Johann Friesen of the Kleine Gemeinde, and Fast's successor, Elder Johann Harder (1811-1875), empathized with--even supported--the Brethren. Fast wrote that he did not have all the facts regarding "the brethren who have dissociated themselves from our decadent church"¹⁴¹ and, therefore, would not sign the document. Friesen requested the authorities "that no political means be employed against the movement."¹⁴² Harder wisely proposed "another way," namely to stay within the institutional church and work toward "genuine reform on the basis of the Scripture."¹⁴³ This report not only alarmed the five elders of the Council, but it also disarmed the authorities in carrying out their threats against the Brethren.

Johann Claassen of the Molotschna--and to a lesser extent also Gerhard Wieler of Chortitza--spent much time and energy in St. Petersburg, negotiating with high government officials for legal recognition of the Brethren.¹⁴⁴ But it was not until May 30, 1866, that Claassen finally received official confirmation of full religious and civil privileges for the Brethren as an independent Mennonite

¹³⁸ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 237.

¹³⁹ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 240.

¹⁴⁰ Friesen, Brotherhood, documents #90, 91, 92, pp. 238-239.

¹⁴¹ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 238.

¹⁴² Toews, History, p. 43; cf. Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 238.

¹⁴³ Toews, History, p. 43.

¹⁴⁴ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 250.

church body,¹⁴⁵ and that thanks to Johann Harder. Senator Hahn put it to Claassen this way: "You have to thank Elder Harder for your deliverance."¹⁴⁶

Stresses from Within

There were also internal tensions and turbulence. Most destructive was the Fröhliche Richtung with tendencies toward radical emotionalism. It appeared first in the Separatist Lutheran Church of Neuhoffnung under the leadership of a man named Kappes, who carried the implications of Wüst's preaching on free grace to extremes. The group split from Wüst's congregation in 1858 and found sympathetic support among the Brethren. Because of their exuberant ecstasy in worship services, these extremists were called the "'Muntere,' 'Lustige,' 'Springer' und 'Hüpfer.'"¹⁴⁷

When the uncontrolled spirit of the group hit Chortitza and Molotschna, it nearly devastated the young Mennonite Brethren Church. Its adherents based their doctrine of liberty--even libertinism--on Romans 7 and Galatians 3:28, and declared themselves the strong and free. All boundaries between slave and free, Jew and Greek, male and female, so they believed, had been removed. This not only led to moral lapses on the part of at least one leader, but also to "an incredible spiritual despotism" and a "regime of tyranny."¹⁴⁸

Gerhard Wieler, Bernard Penner, and Benjamin Becker formed a despotic triumvirate that ruled with an iron fist. They deposed elder Heinrich Hübert, excommunicated others, and arbitrarily banned those members who refused to participate in their noisy and emotionally charged meetings.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Toews, History, p. 48; Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 253-257.

¹⁴⁶ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 253.

¹⁴⁷ Kahle, Aufsätze, p. 161.

¹⁴⁸ Toews, History, p. 61; Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 274; Kahle, Aufsätze, pp. 156, 161-162.

¹⁴⁹ For a complete record see Friesen, Brotherhood, documents #114-126, pp. 262-279.

The June Reform

On April 1, 1865, teacher Daniel Fast drafted a declaration to refute the views of the Fröhliche Richtung. The document addressed such issues as deposition of ministers, the use of the ban, respect for persons, and the nature of a godly life in the world. It served as the basic statement for the June Reform of 1865, in which a number of major internal problems were resolved:

1. It was determined that the church as a whole and not individual leaders must act on such matters as discipline and excommunication according to the Scriptures.

2. It was stated that the church must govern itself through selected ministers who teach and act according to God's Word.

3. It was recognized in a time of prayer and fasting, that the church as a corporate body had confirmed Hübert's call to the ministry and, therefore, he must be reinstated as elder.

4. It was corporately agreed that unscriptural banning of church members by domineering individuals must be declared null and void.

5. It was agreed that the joy of the Lord was to be expressed in an orderly manner, not by shouting, dancing, and drumming in the church.

6. It was stated that greeting guests and nonmembers was, indeed, pleasing to the Lord; therefore, it was not to be avoided under the pretense of separation from the world.

7. It was determined that the false freedom doctrine was considered to be eradicated, and that members who had confessed their errors were to be graciously and gratefully received back into fellowship. These resolutions were publicly announced and corporately accepted in the Molotschna, Chortitza, and Kuban colonies, where the MB Church had by now been firmly established.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Toews, History, pp. 64-65.

The June Reform was the most significant event in the early history of the Mennonite Brethren movement. Repentance, cleansing, and renewal within this young communion brought credibility to the church and fortified its basis for mission to the world.

Another Way for Both

In retrospect, Johann Harder's suggestion of "a different way" would have been the most brotherly and perhaps the only truly Christian course of action possible. His plea was that both the established church and the Brethren work for reform based on the Scriptures.¹⁵¹ Such action could have provided a platform for an alternative resolution, if not peaceful settlement, had both groups only responded to it. After all, what could have been more biblical than to work out their differences from the Bible?

Critical Reflections

Several theological issues emerge that were not dealt with in a redemptive manner by either the Brüdergemeinde or the Kirchengemeinde.

The Question of Unity

At no point does the Document of Secession or any subsequent document by either party address the biblical question of unity in the Spirit. It is true, there are references to reconciliation, but they are more implicit than explicit, and based on demands and conditions.¹⁵² In contrast, the statements on separation are explicit on both sides: We "completely dissociate ourselves from these decadent churches," said the Brethren.¹⁵³ Five Elders replied: They have "dissociated themselves from our [entire] Mennonite brotherhood." Therefore, "we have denounced them . . . [and] make recommendations to the secular authorities with regard

¹⁵¹ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 239.

¹⁵² Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 240, 249, 231.

¹⁵³ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 231.

to their further treatment or punishment."¹⁵⁴ Under such circumstances it became difficult to talk about unity, let alone achieve it.

The Question of Purity

The question of unity in the brotherhood cannot be treated in isolation from such related subjects as purity of the church and integrity of conscience. The Mennonite Brethren defended their secession on biblical grounds, and the Council of Elders sought to justify their denouncement of the Brethren on the same basis.¹⁵⁵ But neither party seems to have searched the Scriptures with the same diligence to find the "other way" for which Elder Johann Harder pleaded. That way suggested by Harder was, indeed, a harder way with only one option for the Brethren: stay in the church, search the Scriptures, and live out its implications by renewal and reform so that the "decadent church" might see the fruit of the Spirit in the more "spiritual" Brethren and follow their example.¹⁵⁶

Not only the Brethren but also some leaders within the church¹⁵⁷ and other Christians outside the Mennonite Church,¹⁵⁸ recognized decadence and corruption of Mennonitism in general. Not even the Kirchengemeinde denied its own internal decay. In fact, the elders saw it too, but they

¹⁵⁴ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 237; cf. p. 249. Note that the Brethren did not say they dissociated themselves from "the entire Mennonite brotherhood," but only from the "decadent churches"; nor did they say, as the elders charged, that the entire brotherhood had "become totally the slave of the devil." Cf. Friesen, Brotherhood, document #83, b) and c), p. 231; #89, 1), p. 237; #93, 1) a, p. 240.

¹⁵⁵ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 237, 249.

¹⁵⁶ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 239.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. the documents by non-Mennonite Brethren, Friesen, Brotherhood, #107, pp. 252-253; #87, pp. 234-236.

¹⁵⁸ Pastor Dobbert's analysis of the condition is no compliment to the Mennonite Church. Cf. Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 249-250; document #170, pp. 384-393.

condoned or excused it on the basis of Jesus' parable of tares among wheat (Mt. 13:24-30). In accordance to this parable, they said, "We believe that such as do not possess the true faith will also be found in a Christian church and therefore [we] extend holy communion to all those who have been baptized upon their acknowledged confession of faith and do not live in manifest sin."¹⁵⁹

The Question of Conscience

This became a critical issue. The Brethren contended that "for God's and conscience's sake" they could no longer stay within the church.¹⁶⁰ Again, "for conscience's sake," so they stated, they were "unable to celebrate communion in the company of unbelievers"; and, for the same reason, they exclaimed, "the Lord forbid that we should call evil, good and good, evil." Whatever happened, they were not prepared to violate the convictions of their consciences sensitized by the Spirit of God during the years of renewal. The slender chord of unity was being stretched to utter limits; it was quivering with tension of the bow with two opposite ends--the ecclesiastical institution and the renewal movement. But it was not yet completely broken. "If the ministers, would [only] attempt to stem the tide of corruption within the churches with all sincerity and in accordance with the Word of God," we hear the Brethren say in a gentle tone, then "we would be happy, even today [March 19, 1860], to set foot in them . . . assist them and, with God's gracious help, plant and help to build the congregations."¹⁶¹

The "if" clause in the Brethren's language is the closest any document comes to Harder's "other way." Yet by its very conditional structure it puts the onus of unity on the elders of the church, for whom the question of conscience was the parable of the tares in the wheat. Not so for the

¹⁵⁹ Friesen, Brotherhood, document #83, p. 248.

¹⁶⁰ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 230.

¹⁶¹ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 240.

Brethren. The sum total then is this: While the Kirchen-gemeinde opted for unity in the large church at the expense of purity, the Brüdergemeinde insisted on purity of the small church at the expense of unity with the larger Mennonite community. That snapped the chord and separation became final with no immediate prospects for reconciliation.

The Cost of Separation

The price paid was high in either case, and the consequences more serious for both groups than may appear on the surface. For one thing, it weakened the dynamic of the renewal movement. At the time the Brethren seceded, their group made up the largest segment of the revival movement. Since they now stood outside the larger ecclesiastical body and were prepared to make it on their own, they gave up the possibility of a spiritual ministry within the institutional church. Saintly men like Bernard Fast, Johann Friesen, Johann Harder, and later Heinrich Dirks and Bernard Harder continued to work within the existing structure and found it possible to do so. But their impact on the large church was severely reduced without the presence and contributions of the Brethren.

Furthermore, the Brethren forfeited the functional know-how of ecclesiastical operations. By withdrawing from the larger church they suddenly found themselves in the midst of a leadership crisis. Men like Johann Claassen, Heinrich Hübert, Abraham Unger, and Jakob Bekker emerged as stalwart churchmen; the movement as a whole was unprepared in Claassen's absence to deal adequately with such a phenomenon as the Fröhliche Richtung. Later they tried to compensate for their organizational weakness by inviting foreign assistance from the German Baptists.

Moreover, the Brethren also had to forgo the possibility of having their ideas and concepts challenged and corrected by others. The mode of conversion (not conversion itself!) may be a case in point. They liked to tell conversion stories which had a tremendous impact on the unconverted in the larger church. The focus was on the experience as a

prerequisite for church membership. That in itself is fully in keeping with the biblical principle of the new birth. "Unless one is born again," said Jesus, "he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:3, 5). But the problem was that the mode of conversion tended to become more important than the fact. Thus when people asked for the sign of a right church, the Brethren could simply answer, "A cataclysmic conversion."¹⁶² Here lurks the danger of an independent movement that so easily prescribes its own experience as the theological norm for others and thereby slips into the very institutional narrowness from which it seeks to escape.

Finally, by the act of secession the Brethren absolved themselves from Christian responsibility of being their brothers' keepers. "We want to be innocent," they declared, "of the souls of the erring."¹⁶³ Obviously, this was not only not an easy step for them to take, but also a very serious one. On the one hand, the Brethren had given up, as it were, on the institution. Thereby they removed themselves from spiritual responsibility towards those still within the structures. On the other hand, the traditional church was glad to be rid of the movement which had inflicted moral discomfort on the institution as long as the tension of its presence had been felt. That tension was now gone.

Yet there was some hope for both. The Kirchengemeinde with its traditional theologizing trait had all the potential needed for giving birth to other renewal movements; the Brüdergemeinde with its dynamic event-character faced the challenge of becoming a missionizing and self-theologizing church in its encounter with the unmissionized world. And there were many forces that made the challenge of theological reflection an eventful reality.

Rekindling the Mission Dynamic

The forces that aided the Mennonite Brethren in recovering a mission dynamic were both internal and external.

¹⁶² Friedmann, Mennonite Piety, p. 70.

¹⁶³ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 231.

The internal forces were more intensive, the external more extensive.

Internal Forces

Winds of change in various congregations brought about a return to God, a renewed interest in the Scriptures, and a new view of the world.

First, like the Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century, the Mennonite Brethren Church was born in the midst of a spiritual revival. Their focus was on spiritual rather than natural birth. When the Holy Spirit rekindled the passions and visions of their forefathers, the Brethren experienced liberation from restrictive structures and enthusiasm for evangelism and mission. "The new emphasis upon a strong personal experience of the grace of God with its accompanying assurance of salvation," notes Cornelius Krahn, "produced a very sturdy and active type of Christian, and led to the development of an almost unbelievable zeal for witnessing for the Gospel in home and foreign missions."¹⁶⁴ Krahn touches upon the basic spiritual force that Mennonites in general were missing prior to the revival movement, namely the power of the Holy Spirit. With the recovery of this power, there came the drive to witness of Christ in the world (Acts 1:8).

Second, they learned a new way of reading the Bible. Lindl and Goßner had brought the Stunde to Russia during the early 1820s. The Mennonites became familiar with this Bible study method through Tobias Voth, and learned a new way of reading the Word. In Einlage, for example, a number of people were converted through simply reading the Scriptures.¹⁶⁵ This happened at a time when the Mennonites were generally of the opinion that the Bible belonged in the church and nowhere else. But now they discovered a new dynamic in the written Word. As people were converted, they

¹⁶⁴ Cornelius Krahn, "Some Social Attitudes of the Mennonites of Russia," Mennonite Quarterly Review 9 (1935), 173.

¹⁶⁵ Unruh, Geschichte, p. 64.

sensed a new urge to talk about the Word of God in homes, at work, and on the streets. This set in motion a chain reaction, and many of those who were spoken to were also convicted of sin and converted to Christ.¹⁶⁶ New power and life were drawn from the Scriptures, unleashing the power of God for the church in world mission.

Finally, they were deeply moved by a concern for the unconverted. They became burdened with their own kinfolk who had the form of religion, but did not know of the freedom and fullness of a new life in Christ. Their vision for the world was a vision for the lost.

External Influences

The factors that contributed to the formation of a Mennonite Brethren mission mentality came to Russia along diverse channels. Aside from the factors which led to the founding of the Church in general, were others distinctly missional in nature. All of them impacted Mennonitism as a whole--the Kirchengemeinde as well as the Brüdergemeinde. Yet the Kirchengemeinde seems to have internalized and absorbed the influences for self-maintenance, while the Brüdergemeinde intentionally implemented them for missionary action in the world. Seven factors can be identified.

The pedagogue Tobias Voth. Earlier in this chapter I pointed out Voth's contribution to the intellectual renaissance of Ohrloff. But his influence went far beyond the cultural and intellectual. His role in Russia was as varied as his background had been in Prussia. His father had been a minister in Brenkenhofswalde. Voth himself was a trained teacher by profession and highly talented as painter and musician. At the age of twenty-seven, he had experienced Christian conversion and was subsequently disciplined in Pietistic circles, where he developed a heart and vision for mission.

In 1822, Voth accepted a call to become the principal of the Ohrloffer Vereinsschule in the Molotschna.

¹⁶⁶ Unruh, Geschichte, p. 63.

Immediately he introduced his students and their parents to Moravian mission literature, conducted mission festivals in schools and churches, and channeled mission funds from the Mennonites in Russia to mission societies in Western Europe.¹⁶⁷

On March 21, 1828, Voth received a letter from the Moravian bishop Gottlob Martin Schneider. The letter was filled with mission concerns and news. Schneider wrote, for example, of the new fields that had been opened in Greenland, Barbados, Jamaica, and Labrador. He spoke of the struggle between darkness and light in the arena of world mission. He also mentioned the centennial celebration of "the great communion service at Berthelsdorf of 1727," and told in a mood of exuberance about the "missionaries on furlough . . . whose stories grip the hearts and minds of the friends of missions."¹⁶⁸ When Voth shared such news with his students, their hearts and minds were touched for mission--and so were those of some parents.

Voth had the full support of Elder Bernard Fast and thus was able to shape in the 1820s a new generation that became an integral part of the spiritual and cultural renewal in the 1840s and 1850s. Such MB leaders as Heinrich Hübert and Jakob Martens, for instance, became Voth's torchbearers in later years. His missionary influence was far-reaching, transcending time and geography. The seed Voth sowed in his lifetime kept on bearing fruit, and the lamp he lit in Ohrloff could no more be extinguished.¹⁶⁹

The writings of Jung-Stilling. By the time the Mennonite Brethren Church was born, there was already an established Jung-Stilling tradition among Russian Mennonites. Jung-Stilling was equally fascinated by the Mennonite way of life. He loved to ruminate on the peaceful atmosphere and

¹⁶⁷ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 96.

¹⁶⁸ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 141-142.

¹⁶⁹ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 96.

warm hospitality he had experienced in Mennonite homes on the Continent.¹⁷⁰ The life style of these "truly Christian and evangelical" friends as well as the writings "des frommen Menno Simons," as he put it, had impressed him so profoundly that he was moved to write an idyllic biography of Menno Simons entitled, Taschenbuch für die Freunde des Christentums, published in 1813.¹⁷¹

His allegorical novel, Das Heimweh (1794),¹⁷² and his Siegesgeschichte (1798),¹⁷³ a commentary on Revelation, had been on the Mennonite reading list for years. But his visit to Russia upon a personal invitation by Czar Alexander I,¹⁷⁴ and the simultaneous release of Der graue Mann (1812), a sensational novel on the human conscience, created a new group of Jung-Stilling enthusiasts who studied his writings with intensity.¹⁷⁵

Although we have no single document that records Jung-Stilling's influence on the Mennonite Brethren, frequently

¹⁷⁰ Christian Neff, "Jung-Stilling über Menno Simons," Christlicher Gemeinde-Kalender, ed. Konferenz der Süddeutschen Mennoniten, vol. 46 (Karlsruhe: Heinrich Schneider, 1937), p. 47; cf. Belk, Trek, pp. 54-55.

¹⁷¹ Belk, Trek, p. 54.

¹⁷² Heinrich Jung-Stilling, Sämmtliche Werke, new ed., 12 vols. (Stuttgart: J. Scheible's Buchhandlung, 1841-1843), vol. 4, parts 1-3; vol. 5, part. 4, pp. 1-306, 307-524. This last volume also contains the Schlüssel (key) to Heimweh, pp. 307-524.

¹⁷³ Jung-Stilling, Werke, vol. 3: Die Siegesgeschichte der christlichen Religion in einer gemeinnützigen Erklärung der Offenbarung Johannis, pp. 56-599. Cf. Jakob C. Schmitt, Die Gnade bricht durch (Gießen und Basel, 1958), p. 184.

¹⁷⁴ Jung-Stilling's influence on the elites of Russia goes back to the time he was professor of Kameralwissenschaft (sociopolitical economics) at the University of Marburg (1787-1803), the years when the first wave of Prussian Mennonites migrated to Russia. No doubt, Jung-Stilling was in touch with that movement. Besides that his many Russian students insisted that he visit their country. Thus when the invitation from the Czar came, Jung-Stilling went. Christian Neff, "Jung-Stilling," Mennonitisches Lexikon, Vol. II, p. 446; cf. Belk, Trek, pp. 53-54.

¹⁷⁵ Belk, Trek, p. 53; cf. Elizabeth Horsch Bender, "Jung-Stilling and the Mennonites," Mennonite Quarterly Review 20 (1946), 91-97.

recurring themes in Jung-Stilling's writings strike a familiar chord.

First, there is the Anabaptist theme of suffering. In his autobiography, Jung-Stilling repeatedly refers to the Mennonites and what it means to follow Christ along "the way of the cross."¹⁷⁶ This was for him the mark of true Christianity. The motto frequently heard among Mennonites was also his: "Leiden ist besser als streiten."¹⁷⁷

Second, he speaks the language of revivalism. His writings are permeated with expressions like Buße, Bekehrung, Glaube, Vergebung, and Heil in Christi Tod. That is why one biographer calls him a Patriarch der Erweckung.¹⁷⁸

Third, he was preoccupied by the concept of salvation. Every Christian, he insisted, must truly seek Christ and have decisive Christuserfahrungen which are confirmed by the Holy Spirit as to their authenticity. "Whoever searches for Christ within himself before he has found Christ for himself, will never find Him at all."¹⁷⁹ Like many Mennonite Brethren during the years of revival, Jung-Stilling had profound Christuserfahrungen in his life. These included cognizance of personal sin, repentance and conversion, forgiveness through the atoning death of Christ, the new birth by the Holy Spirit, justification by faith, and the idea of sonship along with a sense of assurance of salvation.¹⁸⁰

Fourth, he focused on servanthood: "Whoever desires to be a true servant of God," he wrote, "can never separate himself from people, but must separate himself from sin."¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ A. Freybe, "Stilling," in Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1907), vol. 19, p. 50.

¹⁷⁷ Quoted by Schmitt, Die Gnade, p. 172.

¹⁷⁸ Jung-Stilling, Werke, Vol. I: Stilling's Lebensgeschichte, pp. 281-289, 642.

¹⁷⁹ Quoted by Schmitt, Die Gnade, p. 176.

¹⁸⁰ Schmitt, Die Gnade, pp. 172 and 176.

¹⁸¹ Quoted by Schmitt, Die Gnade, p. 178.

Being a true servant must be learned "in the university of God."¹⁸² Servants of the Lord, he said, are "Landsleute aus dem Reiche Gottes," people of the Kingdom who learn by doing, by exercising Christian love, by demonstrating true humility, and by bearing fruit for God.¹⁸³

Fifth, he placed emphasis on eschatology. Like Bengel, Jung-Stilling advocated the imminent return of Christ to establish his millennial reign on earth. While Bengel had set the date at 1836, Jung-Stilling believed that this event would take place in central Asia between 1816 and 1836. Some fifty years later a group of Russian Mennonites under the leadership of Claas Epp fell for his ideas. These "Templers" or "Templars," as they were known, also set a date for Christ's return and were devastated when their hopes were not fulfilled.¹⁸⁴

Finally, his vision for world mission was relevant for the time. As mission societies emerged with increasing frequency, he saw the Spirit of God at work in the world. The missionary spirit of early Anabaptism, Halle Pietism, and Zinzendorf's Moravianism permeated his writings. There was an irresistible sense of urgency about Jung-Stilling's message that had a special appeal to those Mennonites in Russia who were themselves in search for ways to be more assertive in their missionary witness. Small wonder, then, that the Mennonite Brethren included one of Jung-Stilling's best known mission lyrics in their singing. I have sought to capture its original mission dynamic in the following translation:

Father God, Thy Spirit's moving
Through the Christians 'round the world;
From afar we are beholding
Thy great kingdom, Christ, our Lord.
For Thy messengers are sowing
Words divine for a rich yield,
To the millions they are going
On the giant harvestfield.

¹⁸² Schmitt, Die Gnade, p. 169.

¹⁸³ Schmitt, Die Gnade, p. 178.

¹⁸⁴ Belk, Trek, pp. 53-54.

Soon these plants will grow, be blooming
 Everywhere in mighty bands--
 Where evangelists are looming,
 Crossing islands, seas, and lands.
 Tenderly they care for growing
 In the power of Pentecost,
 Whence the streams of life are flowing,
 So that nothing may be lost.

Hail, oh hail, eternal morning!
 Rising Sun, come quickly now!
 Depart and vanish, cares and mourning,
 Daybreak, rise, with all thy glow!
 Lo, the mountain tops are glowing,
 Mirroring eternal light--
 And the flowers of spring are growing;
 Gone is every trace of night!¹⁸⁵

This song, like his writings in general, clearly reflects Jung-Stilling's acquaintance with the missionary movement of his time,¹⁸⁶ his enthusiasm in favor of it, and his apocalyptic, even triumphant, optimism antedating by three generations the nineteenth-century mission spirit of triumphalism so characteristic of the Student Volunteer Movement.¹⁸⁷

Not everything Jung-Stilling did and wrote was positive. But it is the positive aspect of his work that I am concerned with here, particularly his philosophy of mission. From the time of his own conversion in Solingen¹⁸⁸ until his dying day, it was his single passion "to work on a grand scale for Jesus Christ, his religion, and his kingdom."¹⁸⁹ This spirit of enthusiasm and commitment to Christ and his kingdom sparked new vision and motivation among the Mennonite Brethren to become a missionary people.

¹⁸⁵ Dreiband, Part II, No. 592.

¹⁸⁶ In his autobiography, Jung-Stilling describes a visit to Herrnhut (April 2, 1802) which shows his familiarity with this church. Among other things he writes: "Die Faier der Charwoche ist in allen Brüdergemeinden, vorzüglich aber in Herrnhut, herzerhebend und himmlisch" (Werke, Vol. I, p. 727).

¹⁸⁷ Warneck, Abriß, pp. 120-122.

¹⁸⁸ Roessle, Zeugen, p. 121.

¹⁸⁹ Paulus Scharpff, Geschichte der Evangelisation (Giessen: Brunnen, 1964), p. 183.

A missionary remnant. "Even during the darkest decades of spiritual decline," asserts the late J. A. Toews, "God always had His faithful remnant who had not 'bowed their knees to Baal'--whether that Baal be a dead orthodoxy or a spirit of secularism and worldliness."¹⁹⁰ So it was in the Mennonite colonies of Russia. Although the remnant was small, it was, nonetheless, present. Such congregations as Gnadenfeld, Ohrloff, and Alexanderwohl contained a remnant with a missionary spirit.¹⁹¹ The late Orlando H. Wiebe contends that "these three churches were the soil in which the idea and purpose of 'mission to the heathen' took root. And it was in this circle of churches that the first Mennonite missionary found his call and encouragement" to enter crosscultural mission.¹⁹² Yet for many years the Russian Mennonites had neither their own mission work nor a mission society of their own. The funds they collected were sent to such organizations as Herrnhut, Chrischona, Neukirchen, Basel, and the Rheinische Mission in Barmen. "There was scarcely a German Protestant mission society whose work did not receive some support from Russian Mennonites."¹⁹³ When the Dutch Mennonites founded their own mission society, the Russian Mennonites channelled funds (1853) and personnel (1869) for mission to this new venture.

Powerful popular preaching. Johann Bonekemper (1796-1857)¹⁹⁴ and Eduard Wüst were contemporary preachers and

¹⁹⁰ Toews, History, p. 26.

¹⁹¹ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 168, 660.

¹⁹² Orlando H. Wiebe, "The Missionary Emphasis of Pietism," in The Church in Mission: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to J. B. Toews, ed. A. J. Klassen (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature Mennonite Brethren Church, 1967), p. 128.

¹⁹³ Krahn, "Social Attitudes," p. 174.

¹⁹⁴ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 19, 32-33.

zealous promoters of the cause of mission.¹⁹⁵ While Bonekemper remained ecclesiastically tied to the Spenerian principle of the ecclesiola in ecclesia, Wüst advocated separation of the ecclesiola of believers from the traditional ecclesia.¹⁹⁶ That gave him a wide hearing among the Mennonites and his emphasis on mission to the world fell on fruitful ground: Consequently, he not only reaped a greater harvest than Bonekemper among the Mennonite people, but also gained emulators of his preaching style among them. Therefore, says Abram Kroeker, Wüst "ist nicht mit Unrecht der Schöpfer einer neuen Predigtweise unter den Mennoniten genannt worden." He always called for a verdict. Even his sermons at mission festivals were a call for spiritual revival, interconfessional fellowship of believers, celebration of the acts of the Lord, and unity of the dispersed people of God.¹⁹⁷ The impact of the mission festivals conducted by Wüst was both extensive and intensive. People came from Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Reval to hear him.¹⁹⁸ Many Mennonites of the Molotschna experienced total transformation of heart and mind. They began to pray publicly and to study their Bibles in homes; they even became zealous witnesses in their neighborhoods and intentional participators in the cause of mission.¹⁹⁹

The Dutch Mennonite mission. Two distinct phases in the development of Mennonite mission endeavor in Holland must be noted. The first was humanitarian in nature and grew out of a strong sense of empathy with the oppressed and suffering. A total of four societies was established

¹⁹⁵ G. W. Peters, Foundations of Mennonite Brethren Missions (Hillsboro, KS: Kindred Press, 1984).

¹⁹⁶ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 32.

¹⁹⁷ Abram Kroeker, "Pfarrer Eduard Wüst," in Zionsbote, November 20, 1957, p. 16; cf. Kroeker, Pfarrer Eduard Wüst, pp. 76-77.

¹⁹⁸ Kroeker, Pfarrer Eduard Wüst, p. 82.

¹⁹⁹ Kroeker, Pfarrer Eduard Wüst, p. 78.

between 1709 and 1811 to deal with this problem.²⁰⁰

A man of decisive influence during the first half of the eighteenth century was Johannes Deknatel (1698-1759) of the Lammist congregation in Amsterdam. He carried on a wide correspondence with Lutheran and Reformed pastors of Pietist persuasion, was an intimate friend of Zinzendorf and Spangenberg, and such a powerful preacher that John Wesley took notes when he heard him preach in 1738.²⁰¹

The second phase of Dutch Mennonite mission followed on the heels of the upsurge of evangelical mission societies in Europe and America. Two efforts are of special significance.

1. The Dutch Mennonite auxiliary agency to assist the English Baptist Mission Society was founded in 1824. However its momentum began to dwindle when Oncken founded the German Baptist movement in Hamburg in 1834 and initiated aggressive mission work on the Continent.²⁰² This gave the Dutch Mennonites an occasion to review not only their own mission activity, but their whole mission philosophy, motive, and direction as well.

2. In view of independent Baptist work in many parts of the world, the Mennonites also awakened "the still-slumbering love for this holy work."²⁰³ They consulted with Baptist leaders in England, and in 1849 formed the

²⁰⁰ Edmund George Kaufman, The Development of the Missionary and Philanthropic Interest Among the Mennonites of North America (Berne: Mennonite Book Concern, 1931), p. 48.

²⁰¹ Christian Neff, "Deknatel," Mennonitisches Lexikon, vol. 1, pp. 398-399; C. H. Wedel, Abriß der Geschichte der Mennoniten, vol. 3: Die Geschichte der niederländischen, preußischen und russischen Mennoniten (Newton, KS: Schulverlag von Bethel-College, 1901), pp. 43-44; Wiebe, "Missionary Emphasis," p. 126; Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 10.

²⁰² Rudolf Donat, Das wachsende Werk: Ausbreitung der deutschen Baptistengemeinden durch sechzig Jahre (1849 bis 1909) (Kassel: Oncken, 1960), p. 13; Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 659.

²⁰³ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 659.

first Anabaptist Missionary Society of the Netherlands for the Propagation of the Gospel in Overseas Occupied Lands.

Shortly thereafter, Pieter Janß offered himself as a missionary to the new Society. He took two years of preparatory studies, learned the Javanese language, married Miss J. W. F. Schmilan, and declared himself ready to go. In May of 1851, the couple were commissioned as the first Mennonite missionaries since the early Anabaptist mission dynamics had come to an end in the late sixteenth century.

The Janßes began their work in Batavia, now Jakarta, on November 16, 1851. On April 16, 1854, when the revival in Gnadenfeld was nearing its climax, Janß baptized the first five believers, and on the following day observed the Lord's Supper with them. The Gnadenfeld congregation was the first to recognize the importance of this Mennonite missionary event and at once responded with financial support in 1854. The gift of 300 Taler was accompanied by a lengthy letter addressed to the Society in Holland. Because it expresses strong support and a sense of vision for mission, it deserves to be quoted in full.

With real joy we have read in these days excerpts from the report of your Society, sent to us by a friend in Prussia. Above all, we rejoiced to conclude from the report that the Lord, who has bought us with His blood, also has in Holland His own among our brethren, who confess with us the same faith, and who as living branches, united with Him, the true vine, draw their sap from Him and bear fruit. Since we also have the undeserved privilege to stand under the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit, who manifests Himself powerfully among us, we gladly desire to be grateful to the Lord, who is dear to us, and to serve Him. As a result, a missionary society has been established among us several years ago. Since we have learned to know you, our brethren in Holland, in the manner mentioned above, we feel constrained to extend to you herewith the hand of brotherhood. Until now we distributed the funds, which have been gathered in our midst for missions, among various missionary societies of Germany. We now send you the enclosed amount, and declare our readiness, confident of the Lord's gracious help, to contribute this form of assistance out of our treasury more frequently in the event that you have need of it and inform us about it. And now, beloved

brethren, accept us in the Lord, pray for us, that the Lord may expand His Kingdom among us, and that He keep us in His truth.²⁰⁴

The record of this joint missionary effort of the Mennonites in Holland and Russia is impressive on many counts. First, it was wholistic in focus, including evangelism, education, agriculture, medicine, and the building up of a strong national church.²⁰⁵ Second, the cooperation was remarkable. Both Dutch and Russian Mennonite missionaries worked for years in Christian harmony and mutual support for the well-being of a growing church in Java.²⁰⁶ Third, it created an opportunity for theological and spiritual cross-fertilization between the two countries. Fourth, it provided a testing ground for the Brenkenhofswalde-Gnadenfeld spirit of openness and cooperation beyond the confines of the Russian milieu. Fifth, it served as an outlet for the expanding missionary vision that had emerged during the revival in the Mennonite colonies. Sixth, it supplied a channel of continued freshness for growth and nurture of the missionary spirit through actual mission involvement. Seventh, it gave young couples and singles an outstanding chance to demonstrate the reality of God's call in their lives as they moved with the blessing of the church from Russia to Indonesia. Finally, it laid the basis for the realization of a worldwide Mennonite Church. "The Mennonite missionary movement owes a great debt to the daring vision and inspiring example of the Dutch Mennonites: they proved it could be done."²⁰⁷

The Brenkenhofswalde-Gnadenfeld connection. Earlier in this study I have shown the development of the Brenkenhofswalde congregation in Prussia and the role Gnadenfeld played

²⁰⁴ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 660.

²⁰⁵ Christian Neff, "Janß, Pieter Anton," Mennonitisches Lexikon, Vol. II, p. 392.

²⁰⁶ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 664-665.

²⁰⁷ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 96; cf. Peters, Foundations, pp. 16-18.

in the renewal movement in Russia. Both congregations had a vital part in mission.

When the Brenkenhofswalde congregation was faced with political oppression because of its Mennonite distinctives, the Moravian Brethren immediately came to its rescue. During the years when private assemblies were prohibited by law, the congregation functioned under the protection of the Moravians of Herrnhut from 1812 to the time of its migration to Russia in 1834. This was a special time during which the Mennonites were shaped by biblical and missionary dynamics of the Pietists.²⁰⁸ By the providence of the sovereign God, that missionary spirit was transplanted from Brenkenhofswalde in Prussia to Gnadenfeld in Russia.

Gnadenfeld lived up to its name and as a true "Field of Grace" developed into a magnetic center of spiritual warmth and Christian fellowship. Here the Stunden were promoted, mission sewing circles cultivated, and special mission festivals celebrated. Many of those in sympathy with this spirit transferred their memberships from other Mennonite congregations to Gnadenfeld, and many more came to attend the Bible studies and mission festivals.²⁰⁹ It was also Gnadenfeld that gave birth to the first missionary couple ever to be sent from the Mennonite church in Russia to foreign lands--Heinrich and Agnes Dirks. Thus the missionary mentality of the Mennonite Brethren Church is unthinkable without Gnadenfeld, and Gnadenfeld could not have happened without Brenkenhofswalde.

An elder of their kin. Elder Heinrich Dirks (1842-1915) of the Gnadenfeld Kirchengemeinde was of genuine Brenkenhofswalde stock and a man of stature both spiritually and culturally.²¹⁰ He had experienced a spiritual birth

²⁰⁸ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 97-98; "Brenkenhofswalde," Mennonitisches Lexikon, Vol. I, p. 263.

²⁰⁹ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 99.

²¹⁰ J. Klaaßen, "Dirks," Mennonitisches Lexikon, Vol. I, pp. 450-451; Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 660-665, 669.

in the Wüstian revival and received nurture in the bosom of Gnadenfeld. In 1864, he entered the famous Missionshaus in Barmen, where he studied missiology under the equally famous Missionsinspektor, Friedrich Fabri (1824-1891).²¹¹

Upon completion of the Barmen program he served in the medical corps during the Prussian-Austrian War to learn basic medicine. After that he went to Amsterdam to study Javanese, Melanesian, Dutch, and English. He returned to Russia in 1869, married Miss Agnes Schröder and together with her was commissioned by the Gnadenfeld church to serve as missionary in Sumatra under the Anabaptist Missionary Society of Holland. Other Barmen missionaries assisted them in establishing a work at Pakenten, just south of Sipirok.²¹² The work was encouraging. In ten years there was a church with about 100 baptized believers. But the whole project was never as fruitful as that in Java started by Pieter Janß fifteen years earlier.²¹³

Because of ill health, the Dirkses returned to Russia in 1881. This move was in God's providence. Dirks became the elder of his home church in Gnadenfeld, and for thirty-three years a missionary to all Russian Mennonites, informing, inspiring, and motivating them to become a missionary people. He traveled widely and preached powerfully. A short quotation from one of his Missionspredigten entitled Jesus-Feuer (Lk. 12:49) shows the missionary vision, passion and commitment of the man. With Pietistic zeal and

²¹¹ Hans Kasdorf, "Gustav Warnecks missiologisches Erbe," D.Miss. dissertation, School of World Mission of Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California, 1976, pp. 74-78; cf. Wolfgang Schmidt, Mission, Kirche und Reich Gottes bei Friedrich Fabri (Stuttgart: Evangelischer Missionsverlag, 1965).

²¹² Klaaßen, "Dirks," p. 450; Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 665; see also the map in "Die südlichen Battalände auf Sumatra," Evangelisches Missions-Magazin, New Series, 13 (1869), 48, and the article, "Die Mission in Sumatra," p. 49ff., especially pp. 113-121.

²¹³ For a more recent description of Dirks's work see Dr. Anthonie van den Doel, "Segen und Fluch in Sumatra," Der Bote 51 (April 30, 1974), 2-3.

devotion he appealed to the churches for greater dedication to world mission:

It is the desire of the Saviour that the fire which has been lighted in us, should burn brightly, that it should blaze, that it should flame up, that it should throw sparks. This does not mean that we need to neglect the praise of the Saviour in order to have a share in missionary endeavor. Such participation in the work of missions is also a mark of love to the Saviour. He who does not take part in the work of missions can hardly be said to love the Saviour.²¹⁴

Dirks kept abreast with missionary information. In one section he continues:

And O! how much needs to be done in missions until the fire that Jesus has kindled will be burning everywhere throughout the whole earth. The population of the earth is estimated at 1,400,000,000 souls, and of these only 400,000,000 are Christians in whom the fire which Jesus has kindled burns, or could burn. The other 1,000,000,000 are still heathen, Muslims and Jews in whom the Jesus-fire cannot burn because they do not know the Lord Jesus--knowing nothing or too little about Him. . . . Missionaries have to be sent out who will go to the non-Christian peoples. Missions must be propagated, for the very purpose of missions is to kindle the Jesus-fire on the whole earth among all peoples and nations.²¹⁵

Dirks was God's man of the hour. He helped rekindle the mission fires among the Mennonite Brethren as well as other Mennonites. While the Mennonite Brethren supplied funds for the Anabaptist Missionary Society, they sent no missionaries with this organization. The Kirchengemeinde, however, sent at least five couples and two single ladies to Java, and seven couples to Sumatra.²¹⁶

The German Baptists. The record would be incomplete without reference to the German Baptists' contribution to Mennonite Brethren mission thinking in Russia and later in America.

²¹⁴ Quoted by Wiebe, "Missionary Emphasis of Pietism," p. 129.

²¹⁵ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 671-672.

²¹⁶ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 673-674.

The German colonies by Odessa had become a Baptist mission field soon after Oncken founded the Baptist Church of Hamburg in 1834. Oncken's motto, "Every Baptist a Missionary,"²¹⁷ spread rapidly and was received as good news by some open-minded Mennonites. And, as Adolf Ehrt points out, German Baptist literature was channeled via Odessa to the Mennonite colonies.²¹⁸ Such items as Anna Judson's biography, the Taufbuch, the Glaubensstimme, the Missionsblatt, and Christian tracts seem to have been part of the literary diet of the Mennonite Brethren.²¹⁹ Ehrt goes so far as to say that the Baptist ideas were incorporated into a kind of covenant fellowship between the Pietist (separatist) brotherhood movement and the Mennonites. But organizationally, these ideas first found full "expression in the Mennonite Brethren Church on January 6, 1860, in Gnadenfeld, Molotchna, and on March 11, 1862, in Einlage, Chortitza."²²⁰

Rudolf Donat goes a step beyond Ehrt when he interprets the birth of the Mennonite Brethren as an event that marked "the coming into life of a real Baptist Church."²²¹ But then--as if with a sigh of disappointment--he modifies that statement by saying that the New Church has always called itself Mennonite Brethren because it adhered to the principles of its forebears. The three Mennonite distinctives, according to Donat, are (a) nonresistance, (b) refusal to take the oath, and (c) the practice of foot-washing.²²² All three articles were added to the Baptist

²¹⁷ E. Händiges, "Baptisten," Mennonitisches Lexikon, Vol. I, p. 123.

²¹⁸ Adolf Ehrt, Das Mennonitentum in Rußland von seiner Einwanderung bis zur Gegenwart (Berlin: Verlag von Julius Beltz, 1932), p. 57; cf. Waldemar Gutsche, Westliche Quellen des russischen Stundismus (Kassel: Oncken, 1957), p. 36.

²¹⁹ Donat, Das wachsende Werk, p. 162.

²²⁰ Ehrt, Mennonitentum, p. 57.

²²¹ Donat, Das wachsende Werk, p. 162; Händiges, "Baptisten," Mennonitisches Lexikon, Vol. I, p. 124.

²²² Donat, Das wachsende Werk, p. 163.

Glaubensbekenntnis, which the Mennonite Brethren in Russia initially adopted, albeit in a modified form.²²³

Several Baptist leaders made a unique impression during the formative years of Mennonite Brethren mission. Already in the correspondence between Oncken and Unger the question was raised whether Baptist missionaries could be sent to Mennonite colonies in Russia. Legally, that seemed possible only if the missionaries were of professional persons. Thus in 1866, Oncken commissioned August Liebig, his best Handwerkerprediger, to go to Russia.²²⁴ Ehrt calls him "the Baptist missionary in Einlage."²²⁵

Karl Benzien (Bentzin, Benzin),²²⁶ another German Baptist missionary, came to the same village in 1868 and joined the MB Church there. He was a carpenter by profession and evangelist at heart. Benzien played the unique role of a Barnabas, encouraging not only the aggressive "Pauls," but also the timid "John Marks" to move from a missional dimension within the church to a missional intention in the world.²²⁷

In 1869 Oncken himself came to the Mennonites in Russia. One of his first official deeds was to ordain Abraham Unger as the first elder of the MB Church in

²²³ Elder Abraham Unger of Einlage adapted the Baptist Confession of Faith which was subsequently, but only temporarily, adopted by the Mennonite Brethren in Russia. See Glaubens-Bekenntnis und Verfassung der gläubiggetauften und vereinigten Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde im südlichen Rußland (Einlage: A. Unger, 1876). The paragraph on footwashing is inserted as Artikel 9b, p. 24, and other Mennonite Brethren distinctives are appended, pp. 59-64. Bekker, Origin, p. 175, adds that the Mennonite Brethren also objected to becoming Baptists because the latter sanction divorce and smoking by church members. Oncken himself evidently loved his cigar, a stumbling block to the Brethren.

²²⁴ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 37.

²²⁵ Ehrt, Mennonitentum, p. 58.

²²⁶ Donat, Das wachsende Werk, p. 163.

²²⁷ Unruh, "Bericht über das Missionsfeld im Norden Asiens am Obstrom und an den Nebenflüssen," in Geschichte, pp. 351-353, 355, 359.

Chortitza.²²⁸ In that same meeting Unger, in turn, ordained Karl Benzien and Aron Lepp as preachers of the Word.²²⁹

An event of special significance for the mission of the young MB Church was its first annual convention in Andreasfeld (Chortitza), May 14-16, 1872. It was convened upon suggestion by Benzien²³⁰ and upon the request by the Brethren; it was conducted under the able chairmanship of Liebig.²³¹ At this conference the Mennonite Brethren officially initiated the evangelistic ministry of the Reiseprediger or itinerant preachers. A committee of seven members was elected and a team of five evangelists commissioned.²³² In the next chapter I will deal more with the nature and task of this venture.

The Baptist mission influence on the Mennonite Brethren continued in America after the first group emigrated from Russia in 1874. Although the theological differences between the Baptists and the Mennonite Brethren became increasingly pronounced, they "agreed to cooperate in extending the kingdom of Christ and to financially support foreign missions together."²³³

The following points are a summary of the Baptist contribution to a Mennonite Brethren missionary church in terms of both dimension and intention: (a) church polity and order in conducting church business meetings; (b) church structure and organization, including a strong concept of intercongregational solidarity as a Mennonite Brethren conference; (c) Sunday school and the Sunday morning hour

²²⁸ Ehrt, Mennonitentum, p. 58; Donat, Das wachsende Werk, p. 163; Bekker, Origin, p. 174.

²²⁹ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 465; cf. Oncken's letter of October 29, 1869, to his church in Hamburg, Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 462.

²³⁰ Donat, Das wachsende Werk, p. 163

²³¹ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 466-467.

²³² Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 476.

²³³ Bekker, Origin, p. 175; cf. p. 178.

of prayer; (d) a conciliatory spirit and caring ministries among members; (e) a strong urge to evangelize among the Russian people; (f) regular mission offerings; (g) Bible courses of extended duration called Missionsschule; (h) foreign mission work; and (i) inspirational and evangelistic songs.²³⁴

Two concluding observations must be understood. Both have already been alluded to. First, the Mennonite Brethren maintained their basic Anabaptist-Mennonite distinctives stated by the Document of Secession,²³⁵ and never embraced the German Baptist Confession of Faith without serious theological modifications, as Oncken himself conceded.²³⁶ Second, while the visiting German Baptists missionized among the Mennonites, inspiring and motivating the New Church to engage intentionally in mission thrusts throughout Russia, the Mennonite Brethren missionaries became instrumental in founding the Baptist movements of the empire.²³⁷

²³⁴ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 463-467, 475-476; Ehrt, Mennonitentum, pp. 57-60.

²³⁵ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 220-222; cf. Ehrt, Mennonitentum, p. 58.

²³⁶ Donat, Das wachsende Werk, p. 162; Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 463.

²³⁷ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 42; Ehrt, Mennonitentum, pp. 59-60.

Chapter 6

LEARNING TO WALK THE MISSIONARY ROAD

The Mennonite Brethren Church emerged in 1860 as a new and vigorous movement.¹ The clearest sign of vitality was its vision for world mission, which it translated into missionary action. However, the momentum of the revival which had come from Brenkenhofswalde in 1835 and which had subsequently been recharged by the dynamic preaching of Wüst between 1845 and 1859 embraced a much broader sweep of Mennonitism than the secessionists of the Molotschna and Chortitza. For not all who had experienced the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit in their lives did become Mennonite Brethren. Several spiritual giants of such leading congregations as Gnadenfeld, Ohrloff, Rudnerweide, and Alexanderwohl decided to stay and work within the context of the Old Church or Kirchengemeinde, today called the General Conference Mennonite Church.

As I trace the development of this new mission vision and experience I will concentrate on the following broad outline: (a) contextual setting of MB mission thinking; (b) evangelistic witness among ethnic kinfolk; (c) crossing frontiers on Russian soil; (d) mission thinking at the cross-roads.

Contextual Setting of MB Mission Thinking

Several factors should be borne in mind as to the contextual conditions in which the Mennonite Brethren learned to walk the missionary road.

¹ Gerhard Lohrenz, "The Mennonites of Russia and the Great Commission," in A Legacy of Faith: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to Cornelius Krahn, ed. Cornelius J. Dyck (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1962), p. 178.

Philosophical and Historical

Ambiguities

There are ambiguities in the records from which both the story and the philosophy of Mennonite Brethren mission in Russia must be reconstructed. While the influences that shaped their mission thinking can be traced quite readily, their own mission philosophy and structure are difficult to define. Such matters as quantitative and geographical expansion, as well as the qualitative results of a purely Mennonite Brethren religious propaganda, are not easy to determine. Thus Adolf Ehrt may be correct when he points out that the mission of the Jungmennoniten (Young Mennonites, meaning Mennonite Brethren) remained until 1921 "formlos 'schleichend' und unselbständig."²

The reason for this shapelessness is at least fourfold: (a) the total lack of missionary experience of the New Church within either the narrow Mennonite or the wider Russian context; (b) the different signals which they received from other inexperienced mission models in the land, such as the Stundisten, the Pietists, and the Baptists; (c) the Russian antisectarian policies under the Monarchy and later statutes under the Soviet regime, which created untold tensions,³ and (d) the uncertainty of the Brethren among themselves on the issue whether or not to missionize among the Orthodox Russians despite legal prohibition.

Another problem is the demarcation of denominational

² Adolf Ehrt, Das Mennonitentum in Rußland von seiner Einwanderung bis zur Gegenwart (Berlin: Verlag von Julius Beltz, 1932), p. 59.

³ I am thinking particularly of the laws issued in 1866, 1874, and 1876 which gave to the Russian Orthodox Church exclusive mission monopoly, endorsed and supported the anti-evangelical spirit of the ecclesiastical administration on all levels, called for strict enforcement against the slightest acts of violation and universal military service (Ehrt, Mennonitentum, pp. 59-60; cf. C. D. Bondar, Sekta Mennonitov v Rossiya [Petrograd: Tipographiya B. C. Smirnova, 1916], p. 153ff). The new statutes of the Soviet regime after 1917 became even more devastating to all attempts of religious propaganda, as Matthew Spinka points out in The Church in Soviet Russia (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 18-22, 73ff.

models. No confessional lines can be clearly drawn during the early years of MB mission work. They took their first mission steps together with other Christians such as the Stundisten, the Baptists, and the Separatists, both foreign immigrants and native Russians. Thus the Mennonite Brethren worked simultaneously among Mennonites, German colonists, and Russian peoples, and in foreign lands. None, however, provided solid models.

Furthermore, the time line poses another problem. Because of the antireligious sentiments which developed with the emerging Soviet regime in 1917, it is appropriate to treat the Mennonite Brethren mission experience in Russia from the birth of the church in 1860 to the time of its official dissolution with the implementation of Stalin's first Five Year Plan in 1928. This plan proved so effective that even the powerful Patriarch Sergei was forced to capitulate and to surrender a thousand years of Orthodox Church tradition to the dictates of the New State.⁴

While the oppressive measures under the Czarist regime were primarily, though not exclusively,⁵ aimed at the sectarian propagandists who were seen as a threat to the Orthodox Church, those of the New Regime were focused on religion per se. The Constitution of 1928 stated that "freedom of 'religious confession' was restricted to the believers, but freedom of 'propaganda' was restricted to anti-religious organizations and citizens."⁶ With the enforcement of this new ruling, all mission work was officially terminated. Thus it was within the life span of the first two generations of Russian Mennonite Brethren that their mission mentality emerged, developed, prospered, matured, and had to be aborted.

⁴ Spinka, The Church, pp. 51-100.

⁵ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, A History of Russia, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 436.

⁶ Spinka, The Church, p. 73.

The General Mennonite Mindset

The Mennonites in Russia had fostered--and often expressed--a feeling of cultural superiority toward the common people of their adopted land. Their socioeconomic progress of the mid-nineteenth century had not only reinforced their ethnocentric spirit and ethnomypic vision; it also seemed to justify their egotistic attitude and intensify the selfishness of their actions. But the spiritual awakenings between 1835 and 1860 brought with them profound attitudinal and relational changes, including an intentional move from maintenance to mission on the part of those who had experienced renewal in their lives. One can understand and appreciate these changes all the more when one sees them in proper historical perspective in relation to the Mennonite mission mentality in general.

The Great Commandment before the Great Commission. The Russian Mennonites were involved in humanitarian deeds of compassion before and after the birth of the Mennonite Brethren. During both the Crimean War of 1854-1856 and the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878, the Mennonites collected large sums of money to assist bereaved families of fallen soldiers and cared for 6,000 Bulgarian refugees who had come to the colonies for shelter. In addition, "thousands of wounded Russian soldiers were voluntarily taken into Mennonite homes and nursed back to health."⁷

Mission far away but not on Russian soil. Several of those leaders who remained in the Old Church after the revival and birth of the New Church shared with the Brethren their missionary vision beyond the boundaries of Russia, but were slow to see the need within the land itself. For example, Heinrich Dirks, from the Kirchengemeinde, was the

⁷ Ehrt, Mennonitentum, p. 61; Lohrenz, "Mennonites," p. 182. For documentary evidence of the Mennonite voluntary assistance during various wars see P. M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), trans. from the German by J. B. Toews et al. (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978), pp. 575-586.

first Russian Mennonite missionary sent out to cross major cultural and geographical frontiers. Like many Mennonite Brethren, Dirks was a product of the Pietist-oriented Gnadenfeld congregation with spiritual roots in Brenkenhofs-walde. As noted in the previous chapter, Dirks studied at Barmen, was ordained in Gnadenfeld, and in 1869 was commissioned to serve as missionary in Sumatra under the Dutch Mennonite Mission Society.⁸ The results of this effort were encouraging. But the health of both Dirks and his wife failed, and in 1881 they were forced to return. Back in Russia, Dirks assumed the eldership of Gnadenfeld.

The work at Pakanten, however, was not abandoned. The Mennonites negotiated with the Rheinische Mission about a German substitute until a replacement for Dirks could be found. J. Ernst Irle took Dirks' place and continued the Mennonite work at Pakanten until 1888.⁹ Thereafter, the Kirchengemeinde again supplied missionaries from its own ranks. Ehrt interprets this type of mission by proxy as bloße Nachahmungen (mere imitations) of the Dutch and American Mennonites.¹⁰

Theological and historical understanding. Certain leaders of the Kirchengemeinde promoted a mission philosophy that was more colonial than biblical in nature. In opposition to the missionary zeal of the Mennonite Brethren, they argued that mission work among Russians was forbidden by law. Therefore, they insisted, the Lord had not yet opened the door to Russia. Furthermore, to engage in evangelism despite legal restrictions would have serious consequences. The Mennonite Brethren were prepared to bear them, but the Kirchengemeinde felt uncomfortable. Elder Dirks of Gnadenfeld wrote:

⁸ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 669.

⁹ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 668-669.

¹⁰ Ehrt, Mennonitentum, p. 59; cf. Lohrenz, "Mennonites," p. 183; Bondar, Sekta, pp. 156f., 180f.

Is this not the result of zeal without judgment which some new churches [Mennonite Brethren] and their sympathizers have engaged in? Shall we all now pay for the folly of these few? So long as the Lord, who holds the key which opens and closes doors, has not opened the door for free and unrestrained evangelism in Russia we are of ourselves not permitted to break that door ajar. Such action can have serious consequences for us all.¹¹

Dirks' comment reflects the missiologial thinking of the time. As a student at Barmen under Friedrich Fabri, Dirks had breathed the air of Fabri's kingdom-theology and his particular view of progressive history.¹² According to that view, God works through political structures and brings about weltgeschichtliche Türöffnungen as Gustav Warneck, an associate of Fabri, put it.¹³ In keeping with this theology, Dirks believed that God had unlocked the door of Sumatra, where he had been missionary from 1869 to 1881. But the divine moment of unlocking the door for Mennonites to evangelize Russia had historically not yet come. In light of that Kingdom theology, Dirks questioned the legitimacy of Mennonite Brethren mission work in Russia, calling it "zeal without judgment."¹⁴

¹¹ Quoted by Lohrenz, "Mennonites," p. 182.

¹² Hans Kasdorf, "Gustav Warnecks missiologisches Erbe," D. Miss. dissertation, School of World Mission of Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 1976, pp. 74-78; Wolfgang R. Schmidt, Mission, Kirche und Reich Gottes bei Friedrich Fabri (Stuttgart: Evangelischer Missionsverlag, 1965), pp. 99-101, 104-107.

¹³ Gustav Warneck, Evangelische Missionslehre: Ein theoretischer Versuch, 2nd ed. (Gotha: Perthes, 1897), vol. I, pp. 262-263.

¹⁴ Lohrenz, "Mennonites," p. 182.

Missionary dimension without missionary intention. In order to compensate for inactivity in the wider community, the Kirchengemeinde settled for what it called innere Mission. Its focus was primarily on internal well-being without any consideration for peoples outside the colonies. An excerpt from the minutes of a conference held on January 24 and 25, 1883, in Halbstadt reads as follows:

In the interest of home [innere] mission we wish and feel compelled to commit ourselves to work toward its realization: (a) that Christian nurture, family devotions, prayers, and above all, the demonstration of genuine piety be pursued in the home; (b) that the schools through humble and pious teachers pursue the same goals together with both the parents and the pupils; (c) that all the congregations in united concert seek to achieve the same ends through Sunday school work with children and youth activities for junior and senior young people in order to provide wholesome Christian entertainment and thorough catechetical instruction; and (d) that a common bond of love embrace, and that the preaching of the Word of God reach all our congregations and our scattered people everywhere (1) through the placement of elders and teachers as far as possible and feasible, and (2) through the introduction of the Reiseprediger who can expect to be supported by free-will offerings from all church members.¹⁵

Although this statement expresses aspects of the missionary dimension, it is mute on the missionary intention.

Mennonite Brethren mission thinking went in a somewhat different direction from that of the larger body of Mennonites. Introversion and isolation would not do. Emphasis on both internal growth and external mission was evident quite early in the New Church's history. The greatest urgency, however, was to missionize among the Russian peoples. The Brethren could no longer be content with peaceful coexistence; they felt compelled to press forward and find ways of implementing the Great Commission among the Russians. The newly emerging missionary

¹⁵ Heinrich Ediger, ed., Beschlüsse der von den geistlichen und anderen Vertretern der Mennonitengemeinden Rußlands abgehaltenen Konferenzen für die Jahre 1879 bis 1913 (Berdjansk: Druck und Verlag von Heinrich Ediger, 1914), p. 8.

dimension gave the Brethren no rest until they found avenues of expressing their missionary intention in tangible ways.

Signs of change and a spirit of support. The concept of innere Mission was extremely narrow at best. Sunday school, youth work, and Reisepredigtdienst were innovative components borrowed from the Mennonite Brethren. Yet they were entirely inner-directed. But changes were in the making. For example, at the conference of 1888 the Kirchengemeinde stressed the need for "conversion and renewal of the heart" of the preachers,¹⁶ and the implementation of the 1883 decision regarding innere Mission in the churches.¹⁷ In 1890, i.e., eighteen years after the Mennonite Brethren had commissioned five itinerant preachers, the Kirchengemeinde decided to commission its first full-time Reiseprediger with financial support, provided a suitable person could be found for such work.¹⁸ Another encouraging fact was that some leaders within the Old Church identified with and supported the spirit of the ideal Christian propaganda of the New Church.¹⁹

The Chortitza Declaration. By the end of the nineteenth century some attitudinal changes toward mission had become evident. Yet a core of leaders within the Kirchengemeinde continued to resist such changes and to oppose all mission efforts undertaken by the Brüdergemeinde. At a joint convention of the two church bodies held at Neuhalbstadt in the Molotschna on April 11-12, 1914, the Mennonite leader P. Penner of Chortitza read the following statement:

The Convent [Council of Elders] of Chortitza in agreement with the churches has declared at its last brotherhood meeting on April 8 of the current year

¹⁶ Ediger, Beschlüsse, p. 27.

¹⁷ Ediger, Beschlüsse, p. 29.

¹⁸ Ediger, Beschlüsse, pp. 39-40.

¹⁹ A. H. Unruh, Die Geshichte der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde 1860-1954 (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, Ltd., 1955), pp. 295-296.

[1914], that any joint effort in appealing together with the Mennonite Brethren to the government in matters of church issues is doomed to failure.²⁰

The reason for this position, Penner went on to explain in the Declaration, was the Mennonite Brethren mission to the Russian peoples:

The government prohibits the preaching among adherents of the state religion. For 125 years the Mennonites have respected this law, and the government should not now think that we have become unfaithful to our principles. But the missionary activities of the Mennonite Brethren have caused all sorts of misunderstandings, persecution and oppressions, yea, even juridical processes and expulsion from the land. The Chortitza Mennonites do not want to be identified with the Mennonite Brethren before the government. Should this happen, however, then success in any kind of confessional recognition can hardly be expected.²¹

In response to the Declaration, the MB historian P. M. Friesen drafted a lengthy document in which he pointed out that the ideas expressed by Penner did not represent the views of all Mennonite leaders within the Old Church.²² He stated that some of the men were in agreement with the Brethren. But he went on to say that they must differentiate between "criminal propaganda" and "ideal propaganda." Criminal propaganda, Friesen explained, meant to ridicule the practice of the Orthodox Church, bribe its members to join another confession or persuade them to leave their Church and make threats against them if they failed to do so. It was this type of propaganda, asserted Friesen, which was forbidden and punishable by law, and the Brethren did not engage in it. But there was another kind of propaganda commanded by a higher law, namely the simple proclamation of the gospel with which the hearts of the witnesses were overflowing. The Mennonite Brethren and some other Mennonites were engaged in this type of ideal

²⁰ Quoted by Unruh, Geschichte, p. 285, and documents, pp. 286-301.

²¹ Unruh, Geschichte, p. 285.

²² Unruh, Geschichte, p. 286ff.

propaganda because they "must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).²³

Russian Revival Movements

The Mennonite Brethren became heavily involved in the spiritual awakening among the Russian people between 1860 and 1928. Three distinct streams flowing on different social levels can be identified, together with their sources.

The lower class revival. This main stream had major Western sources, but gained its most powerful momentum when it was able to generate its own resources. It began in the Ukraine where Lindl, Goßner, and Johann Bonekemper preached at different times from 1819 to 1848.²⁴ But more important for our purpose are the revivals just prior to and after 1860. Waldemar Gutsche points out that simultaneously with revivals among Mennonites, that is, between 1848 and 1865, the Spirit of God was also moving in the German villages around Rohrbach and Worms. The waves of this movement spilled over into the Russian villages around Ossnowa in the Ukraine.²⁵

Karl Bonekemper, son of Johann Bonekemper, played a major role. During the years of his father's missionary and pastoral career in Russia (1824-1848),²⁶ Karl studied in Odessa and Kiev and became a master of the Russian language. Subsequently he went to America where he experienced a total transformation of life and decided to follow in his father's footsteps. He became a Reformed pastor, returned to Europe, taught at Chrischona for eight years, and then went back to Russia in 1865. He soon discovered

²³ Unruh, Geschichte, p. 295.

²⁴ Waldemar Gutsche, Westliche Quellen des russischen Stundismus (Kassel: Oncken, 1957), pp. 20-24, 28-30, 46-49; cf. Paulus Scharpff, Geschichte der Evangelisation (Giessen und Basel: Brunnen, 1964), pp. 133-134.

²⁵ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 48.

²⁶ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 28 and 30.

the afterglow of the revival fires among Lutherans and Mennonites of the Ukraine. Since he was multilingual, he served all groups, but was particularly useful among the Russians.²⁷

Just as the Wüstian revival among the Lutherans of Neuhoftnung and the Mennonites of the Molotschna had been of Western origin, so did the revival in the Ukraine come via Western channels. It reached its greatest momentum when the Ukrainian evangelists Ivan Onyschtschenko and Michael Ratuschnyj moved into leadership positions. Both were converts and disciples of Johann Bonekemper, and both were inspired to become aggressive in evangelism by another national Christian leader, Ivan Rjaboschapka.²⁸

Rjaboschapka, however, was the spiritual heir of Jafim Cymbal, the father of the Ukrainian Baptist Church who, according to all German sources, was baptized by the MB elder Abram Unger of Einlage on July 11, 1869, together with some thirty German Lutherans from Alt-Danzig.²⁹

The revival in the Ukraine took place among people of the lowest socioeconomic class. They were the servants and the serfs, the uneducated and preliterate, the deprived, oppressed, and truly poor in spirit. But they were receptive to the gospel message.³⁰ Ecclesiastically, this movement emerged in the 1860s as the first Russian Baptist Church, although it could not be officially registered as such until after the Revolution of 1905.³¹

The middle-class revival. The second stream of the revival had its source in the sectarian Molokan movement. This was a kind of independent church that had emerged from Russian Orthodoxy and became an indigenous movement. While the revival in the Ukraine had been ignited by fires from

²⁷ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 46-47.

²⁸ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 48-49.

²⁹ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 50, 52.

³⁰ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 46.

the West, the Molokans had their spiritual roots completely in Russian soil and culture. But its major currents merged with Western streams, namely the Stundismus and the Baptists.³²

The origin of the Molokans is historically not clear. Some believe that they disregarded the religious prohibition of drinking milk during times observed as fast days by the Orthodox Church. Hence their name Molokans, or "milk drinkers." Others, however, claim that they got their name Molokans from the River Molotschna (milk river) where large numbers of them had settled as neighbors to the Mennonites. Whatever the case may be, the Molokans, like the Mennonites, refused to take the oath and bear arms. As a result, they became targets of persecution. In 1875 Molokans numbered approximately two million members and, again like the Mennonites, were progressive farmers, artisans, professionals, and business people. Many lived in cities and belonged to the middle class.³³

The Molokans had suffered great spiritual losses through persecution from the outside and from internal legalistic tendencies. The revival, however, released fresh streams of life and energy that gave birth to some of Russia's renowned spiritual giants. Ivan Stepanovitch Prochanov (1869-1935) and Wassilij Gurjewitch Pawlow (1854-1924) stand tallest among them.³⁴

Confessionally, this new movement in Central and Northern Russia was much more ecumenical in spirit than the peasant revival in the Ukraine. The Molokan believers found their main ecclesiastical affinity in the aristocratic circle of St. Petersburg which was much like the alliance

³¹ Waldemar Gutsche, Religion und Evangelium in Sowjetrußland zwischen zwei Weltkriegen (Kassel: Oncken, 1959), p. 20.

³² Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 54-55.

³³ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 56-57.

³⁴ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 51; cf. Wilhelm Kahle, Evangelische Christen in Rußland und der Sowetunion (Wuppertal und Kassel: Oncken, 1978), pp. 18-37.

model of the Plymouth Brethren brought from Britain to Russia by men like Granville Augustus William Waldgrave (1833-1913), commonly known as Lord Radstock,³⁵ Georg Müller (1805-1898), and Friedrich Baedeker (1823-1906).³⁹ The latter two were of German origin.

Mennonite Brethren had contact with both groups, the Alliance and the Molokans. The association of the two groups resulted in the adoption of the name Jewangeliskije Christianje (Evangelical Christians) rather than Baptistije (Baptists).³⁷

Prochanov assumed the presidency of the All-Russian Union of Evangelical Christians at the first conference of this movement, held in St. Petersburg from December 25, 1908 to January 7, 1909.³⁸ In 1910 he joined a number of the Mennonite Brethren leaders at a consultation in Halbstadt, Molotschna, where the decision was reached to build a theological school in St. Petersburg for the education of preachers and evangelists. Since he had studied theology in Paris, Bristol, London, and Berlin, it seemed only natural that he should be the director of this school. Johann Kargel, pastor in St. Petersburg, and the Mennonite Brethren evangelist Adolf Reimer were appointed as the first faculty.³⁹

The upper-class revival. The fountainhead of this third revival movement was located in the capital of the empire, from where it gushed forth in streams of living

³⁵ Kahle, Christen in Rußland, p. 23; Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 59-60.

³⁶ Latimer, R. S., Ein Bote des Königs: Dr. F. W. Baedekers Leben und Wirken (Barmen: Emil Müller's Verlag, 1907).

³⁷ Kahle, Christen in Rußland, pp. 26-32; Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 61-62.

³⁸ Kahle, Christen in Rußland, p. 29.

³⁹ Heinrich H. Goossen, Adolf Reimer: Ein treuer Bote Jesu Christi unter Deutschen und Russen (Yarrow, B.C.: Columbia Press, 1960), pp. 18-19; Kahle, Christen in Rußland, pp. 29-30.

water into different quarters of the land. But its origin can again be traced to Western sources, both German and British. During the reign and reforms of Peter I, known as the Great (1682 [1694]-1725),⁴⁰ Russia had entered the Imperial Era. That means that the Czar had succeeded in consolidating the various factions into one regime with an obviously secure position for the Emperor. This era lasted until its fateful end in the Revolution of 1917.⁴¹

Two moves by Peter the Great shaped the religious scene of Russia for the next 200 years more than anything that had ever happened prior to the Bolshewik takeover. For one thing, he replaced the Patriarch with the Holy Synod, which consisted of ten, later twelve, clerics. The new structure was based on neither Muscovite nor Byzantine ecclesiastical traditions but, ironically, borrowed from the European Lutheran model--with major adaptations, to be sure. This move gave the Czar freedom to exercise absolute authority in all church affairs.⁴² This meant, as Gutsche observes, that the Orthodox Church found itself in a kind of "Babylonian captivity of the state."⁴³ The Czar maintained this position until 1917. Thereafter the new Soviet Revolutionary Republic once again allowed the Sobor or Church Council to elect a Patriarch. The lot was cast and on November 19, 1917, Metropolitan Tikhon (Tichon) of Moscow became the spiritual head of the Russian Orthodox Church.⁴⁴

The second move by Peter was related to the first. When Sweden was defeated in the Great Northern War and forced to sign the Treaty of Nystadt with Russia in 1720,

⁴⁰ Riasanovsky, Russia, pp. 235-267.

⁴¹ Cf. Harrison E. Salisbury, Black Night, White Snow: Russia's Revolutions 1905-1917 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1978), pp. 249-392; Riasanovsky, Russia, p. 235.

⁴² Riasanovsky, Russia, p. 257; Gutsche, Sowjetrußland, p. 19.

⁴³ Gutsche, Sowjetrußland, p. 17.

⁴⁴ Spinka, Church in Soviet Russia, pp. 13-14.

the Czar again saw an opportunity to his advantage.⁴⁵ The occupied Baltic provinces contained a heavy concentration of Lutheran nobility. Peter and his European aids were quick to recognize the potential of social and spiritual resources in these people and invited many of the noble families to the imperial court. This connection between East and West had far-reaching consequences. For one thing, it became the basis for ethnic integration between Western Lutheran aristocracy and Eastern Orthodoxy. Furthermore, it became the glue for an abiding relationship between court personnel of the Monarchy and their relatives in Western Europe. Finally, it also paved the way for large masses of German emigrants, including the Mennonites from Prussia, to settle on Russian lands.⁴⁶

The third stream of the Russian revival must be seen in the light of this historical background. The German names of many Russian officials who dealt with the Mennonite settlers betray their Western origin. Many members of Protestant nobility in Western countries had been spiritually transformed during various revival movements and were concerned about their Russian counterparts and relatives. That is why leading evangelicals as Lord Radstock, Friedrich Baedeker, Georg Müller and others found a wide open door to the upper echelon of the Russian capital during the long reign of Alexander II (1855-1881), who was selectively kind to some--including the Mennonites--and cruel to many.⁴⁷

This revival movement had its beginning when Lord Radstock made his first visit to St. Petersburg in 1874, the year the Mennonites began emigrating to America. People like the Czar's court marshal, Count Modest

⁴⁵ Riasanovsky, Russia, pp. 248-249.

⁴⁶ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 59.

⁴⁷ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 60-61; Hans Brandenburg, Christen im Schatten der Macht: Die Geschichte des Stundismus in Rußland (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1974), pp. 102-103.

Modestowitsch Korff, the well-known Duchess Sophie Lieven, and her cousin Countess Gagarin, as well as Alexandra von Peucken, several widows and other prominent women, and above all the unusually wealthy and influential commander of the Czar's cavalry, Duke Wassilij Alexandrowisch Paschkow (d.1902), were among the pioneers of the movement.⁴⁸

Paschkow became the leader, hence the name of the movement as Paschkowzy or Paschkovites. Here in 1905 the Mennonite Brethren theologian-evangelist Jakob Kroeker (1872-1948) became one of the most prominent figures.⁴⁹

After the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, the time of limited toleration for the aristocratic believers was over. All those who professed their Christian commitment had to pay a high price. The persecutions in the name of Russification under the passionate and autocratic reign of Alexander III (1881-1894) and the early years of Nikolaus II (1894-1917) knew no bounds. The new ecclesio-political infrastructure was designed, implemented and executed almost single-handedly by the last deeply pious, but clever and evil-spirited Romanov: Konstantin Petrowitsch Pobjedonowszew (1827-1907).⁵⁰

Pobjedonowszew was a strange kind of "grand inquisitor" with a deep sense of personal piety in his own life, an undivided loyalty to the Orthodox Church, and an equally unswerving commitment to operate by the letter of ecclesio-political absolutism. His single goal was to restore the full autocracy of one Czar, the nationalism of one nation,

⁴⁸ Brandenburg, Christen, pp. 103-105; cf. Jakob Kroeker, Die Sehnsuch des Ostens (Wernigerode a.H.: Licht dem Osten, n.d.), pp. 7-14.

⁴⁹ Brandenburg, Christen, p. 104; Maria Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben: Erinnerungen aus dem Leben des Missionsdirektors Jakob Kroeker (Wüstenrot: Kurt Reith Verlag, 1949), pp. 52-60.

⁵⁰ Johannes Warns, Rußland und das Evangelium: Bilder aus der evangelischen Bewegung des sogenannten Stundismus (Cassel: J. G. Oncken Nachfolger, 1920), p. 114; Brandenburg, Christen, pp. 111-118.

and the orthodoxy of one religion.⁵¹ This system knew only one law: elimination of all heretics, for whom there was no place in Russia.⁵²

In the 1870s, when the Mennonite Brethren were still in their first-generation infancy, the imperial persecutions reached unprecedented proportions. Each year between 80,000 and 100,000 evangelical converts from the Orthodox Church were sent to Siberia alone.⁵³ Despite such stringent measures a relatively large and strong group of believers of the aristocratic circle in St. Petersburg survived the Pobjedonowszew purge and even grew during this third stream of the revival.

It is interesting to note that between 1860 and 1928 the Mennonite Brethren mission fervor and dynamic emerged, developed, was refocused and diverted, and finally revived and declined within this larger historical context.

Evangelistic Witness Among Ethnic Kinfolk

The cradle of the Mennonite Brethren mission movement was rocked in the same sociocultural milieu in which the Church itself was born. The changes that had taken place during the Mennonite Renaissance were more internal than external in nature and effect. Because of this spiritual transformation, the members of the New Church looked at their environment with totally different eyes. They began to understand their purpose of being not merely from a cultural, but also from a spiritual point of view (II Cor. 5:16; I Cor. 2:14). They were to be a missionary church in the world.

The world, too, took on a different meaning. The early Mennonite Brethren realized that they lived right in the midst of it and felt called to missionize the people

⁵¹ Brandenburg, Christen, p. 115; Warns, Rußland, p. 127.

⁵² Warns, Rußland, pp. 112-130.

⁵³ Warns, Rußland, p. 166.

surrounding them, both Mennonite and Lutheran colonists. These were people of their own flesh and blood linguistically, culturally--often also biologically--related. Once the Mennonite Brethren had become an intentionally missionary people, these kinfolk became one of their primary missional targets.

Spontaneous Witness
Among Mennonites

Like the Anabaptists and early Pietists, the Brethren saw themselves, their extended families, and their neighbors in a new light. Many church members knew little or nothing of the transforming power of God's grace in their lives and needed to be confronted with the Good News of forgiveness. Oncken's motto, "Every Baptist a missionary"⁵⁴ was translated into "every Mennonite Brethren a witness." Fervent prayer and personal evangelism became the responsibility of every believer. The Brethren became so aggressive in their verbal witness that they were actually feared by other Mennonites "because at every opportunity they would inquire as to the individual's relation to Christ."⁵⁵

The records about methods and means used to evangelize among the Mennonite kinfolk are sparse. The best indication is that the expansion of the first decade or so was spontaneous rather than structured and thus entirely in keeping with the historical record of the apostolic church. What that means has been adequately delineated by Roland Allen (1868-1947). "Spontaneous expansion," says Allen, "begins with the individual effort of the individual Christian to assist his fellow, when common experience, common difficulties, common toil have first brought the

⁵⁴ Händiges, "Baptisten," in Mennonitisches Lexikon, Vol. I, p. 123.

⁵⁵ Jacob J. Toews, "Early Mennonite Brethren Missions," master's thesis, Winona Lake School of Theology, Winona Lake, IN, 1967, p. 72.

two together."⁵⁶ This certainly fits the early Mennonite Brethren experience. There is no evidence of pressure evangelism or of an imposed sense of mission. It was rather an extension of the revival movement brought from Prussia now carried on at the grassroots level by those who themselves had been revived. The proverbial saying of "Gerettet sein gibt Rettersinn"⁵⁷ was actually put into practice. Those who had repented and experienced the grace of God in their own lives were anxious to convey that sense of peace in Christ to friends and neighbors. The result was that by 1864 the Einlage MB Church had 200, and the church in the Molotchna 250 members, and that despite severe opposition and persecution.⁵⁸

One of the more structured methods of mission expansion was the Bibelstunde which the Mennonite Brethren observed for at least three generations.⁵⁹ The Stunden were usually held in homes, served to edify believers, and carried an evangelistic tone in a very simple manner. Between 1860 and 1872 all Stunden were conducted in the Low German language and thus had natural appeal to the uneducated and nonsophisticated Mennonites.⁶⁰ In these meetings "much soul winning was done through the informal discussion of Scripture in private homes and through the sharing of experiences made with their Lord."⁶¹

Another channel of outreach--at least by implication--

⁵⁶ Roland Allen, Spontaneous Expansion of the Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 10.

⁵⁷ I cannot trace the root of that saying, but have heard it many times from my father and others who brought it from Russia to the church in Brazil where the Mennonites experienced a great revival in 1947-1948.

⁵⁸ Missionsblatt der Gemeinde getaufter Christen 23 (1865), 157.

⁵⁹ H. H. Janzen, "Unsere Bibelstunden," The Voice 2, No. 6 (1953), 10-13; 3, No. 1 (1954), 9-12.

⁶⁰ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 469.'

⁶¹ Toews, "Early Mennonite Brethren Missions," p. 73.

was the regular preaching service. Men like Christian Schmidt of the Brüdergemeinde and Bernard Harder of the Kirchengemeinde were the great evangelists of those days. They were "our Wüsts" or our "South-Russian Spurgeons," notes Friesen.⁶² Schmidt later became itinerant evangelist and mission promoter in Mennonite villages. "The sowing he did during his life is inseparably bound up with the work and essence of the M.B. Church. To a not insignificant degree it received its unique character through him."⁶³

Intentional Witness Among Europeans

During the early stages of the New Church some of the converts demonstrated real missionary zeal. When, for instance, the Danish Bible colporteur Otto Forschhammer learned of the revival among the Mennonites and requested that two men join him in his work in Saratov on the Volga, Benjamin Bekker and Heinrich Bartel responded at once and joined Forschhammer in his missionary outreach.⁶⁴ The basis for Forschhammer's appeal was that "the Lord has an open door here for the acceptance of the Gospel."⁶⁵

As they went from place to place offering books for sale, they found many people hungry for salvation. These concerned persons gathered privately in the evenings for edification, and, when at prayer, lamented much and cried for mercy. They were ignorant of the provision of free grace of God in Christ Jesus which brings joy to a follower of Christ. The three brethren took the excellent opportunity to expound to them the glad news of the Gospel which brought results. Because the work of these brethren stirred up new life among the people, the Lutheran pastors became disturbed, for a number of their members severed their connections with the Lutheran church. They asked the colporteurs to stage a discussion before them so they

⁶² Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 469.

⁶³ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 539; cf. p. 505.

⁶⁴ Jacob P. Bekker, Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church, trans. D. E. Pauls and A. E. Janzen (Hillsboro, KS: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1973), pp. 33, 35.

⁶⁵ Bekker, Origin, p. 33.

could learn how to witness to lost souls. Then they directed the two brethren to talk to their schoolteacher who would hear them and judge the validity of their message. The brethren replied that they were unable to speak with learned words, and therefore could not conduct fluent discourses, but that only the Spirit of God would speak through them. Thereupon they began their discourse with the schoolteacher. . . . They soon discovered that he was unconverted, and so explained to him how to proceed if he wished to be fully converted to Christ.⁶⁶

Despite serious opposition from the Mennonite hierarchy in the Molotschna⁶⁷ and from the Lutheran ecclesiastical and civil leaders in the Saratov District, the Brethren continued their work, with some interruptions but with significant results. In 1875, Elder Peter Eckert and several other families converted during the mission work of Bekker and Bartel on the Volga settled in Marion County, Kansas, and became the nucleus of the first Mennonite Brethren Church in America.⁶⁸

The missionary witness among non-Mennonite kinfolk received increased attention after the MB Church was formally organized. In fact the work among their "second cousins" of German and Swedish Lutheran descent in Old and New Danzig by Odessa and in villages along the Dnieper was more effective than that among their own people on home turf.⁶⁹

Both the missionary vision and ecumenical spirit of Mennonite Brethren became evident. Some of their best preachers and evangelists, e.g., Johann Wieler (1839-

⁶⁶ Bekker, Origin, pp. 35-36.

⁶⁷ Bekker, Origin, p. 33.

⁶⁸ Bekker, Origin, pp. 35-38; P. M. Friesen, Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Brüderschaft in Rußland (1789-1910) im Rahmen der mennonitischen Gesamtgeschichte (Halbstadt, Taurien: Verlagsgesellschaft "Raduga," 1911), Part II, p. 7.

⁶⁹ Lohrenz, "Mennonites," pp. 179-180; Rudolf Donat, Das wachsende Werk: Ausbreitung der Baptistengemeinden durch sechzig Jahre (1849 bis 1909) (Kassel: Oncken, 1960), p. 164.

1889),⁷⁰ Jakob Bekker, Heinrich Neufeld, Abram Unger, Benjamin Bekker, Gerhard Wieler, and Johann Klassen took the initiative in a far-reaching missionary venture. I say "far-reaching" because it actually led to the formation of the Baptist Church in Russia among both German and Russian peoples.⁷¹

When Mennonite Brethren evangelists got to Old and New Danzig in 1863, they found several Stunden-Brüder who had read the Bible and other Christian literature, including Spurgeon's sermons. The Stunden-Brüder had created tensions among the Lutherans about the question of baptism. Like the believers of Beroea (Acts 17:10-11), so these Stundisten diligently searched the Scriptures for clarity on what appeared to them a very important matter. The revival was rekindled and on May 10, 1864, Wieler and Bekker baptized about twenty believers at New Danzig who joined the German Baptist Church in Russia.⁷² On July 11, 1869, Abram Unger baptized another thirty members of the same group in Old Danzig,⁷³ one of whom was Efim Cymbal

⁷⁰ Wieler was one of the greatest young MB evangelists with an enormous impact on the Russian and Ukrainian people leading to the formation of the Baptist Church in Russia in 1884. Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 65-75; Aron A. Töws, Mennonitische Märtyrer der jüngsten Vergangenheit und der Gegenwart (Winnipeg: Selbstverlag des Verfassers, 1949), Vol. I, pp. 29-30.

⁷¹ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 42; Donat, Das wachsende Werk, p. 164.

⁷² Donat, Das wachsende Werk, pp. 164-165.

⁷³ There is a discrepancy in the date as well as the name connected with this baptism: Bondar (Sekta, p. 162) and Lohrenz ("Mennonites," p. 180), give July 11, 1869 as the date of the baptism whereas Ehrt (Mennonitentum, p. 60) and Donat (Das wachsende Werk, p. 169), cite June 11. Furthermore, Lohrenz states that Johann Unger carried out the baptism, Bondar gives Unger without initial, while Ehrt and Donat agree that it was Abraham Unger. I am following the oldest Russian source, namely that by Bondar. Since Abraham Unger was from the very beginning of the MB Church intimately involved with the German Baptists, it can be assumed that he performed the rite of believers' baptism in Old Danzig on July 11, 1869.

(Jefim or Juchim Cimbäl or Zimbäl), the founder of the Baptist Church in the Ukraine.⁷⁴

Since the Baptists had no legal charter in Russia at that time, five leaders of the first group were immediately arrested, imprisoned, and exiled to Turkey.⁷⁵ The persecution of both the Stundisten and the Baptists was intensified, irrespective of their ethnic adherence. That put the Mennonite Brethren missionaries in a precarious position. On the one hand, they felt the call to evangelize. On the other hand, evangelism meant increasing the pressure of persecution, for the new Baptist movement more than for themselves.

In 1874 Johann Wieler wrote to Oncken: "I ask you once more with utmost seriousness to use every means in order to free the poor Russian people from this persecution."⁷⁶ But all efforts by them as well as Mennonite Brethren help from church officials in Switzerland, England, and America brought insignificant results for the persecuted. The revival, however, prospered despite oppression, deprivation, and persecution. It spread rapidly to the Swedish colonies Schlangendorf and Mülhausendorf and to the Jewish settlement Dobrojin in the Cherson province, just west of Ekaterinoslav.⁷⁷

The Russian Orthodox scholar C. D. Bondar stresses the fact that the Mennonite Brethren were in the forefront of all evangelistic thrusts. He goes on to make the striking observation that the Mennonite Brethren had such a strong Baptist orientation with regard to baptism and the Lord's Supper that their converts in Lutheran, Jewish, and even Orthodox colonies did not become Mennonite Brethren, but Baptists. That raises the question whether the Mennonite

⁷⁴ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 50-52; Donat, Das wachsende Werk, p. 169; Bondar, Sekta, p. 162f.

⁷⁵ Donat, Das wachsende Werk, p. 164f.; Bondar, Sekta, p. 160; cf. Missionsblatt 23 (1865), 157.

⁷⁶ Quoted by Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 75.

⁷⁷ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 75-76.

Brethren deliberately formed Baptist churches because of theological convictions on baptism or for mere expediency. Were they afraid to accept these new converts into their own churches and thereby lose their Mennonite privileges? Whatever the reason may have been, we know that they maintained contact with the new Baptists in German colonies as well as among Russian peoples and continued to play a significant role in the development of this indigenous movement.⁷⁸

The Reiseprediger as Mission Concept

The Reiseprediger (itinerant preacher) as a means for missionary outreach was nothing new in the history of the church. But for the Mennonites in Russia it was a novel venture. The Brethren found this concept so meaningful that they maintained it at great cost for several generations, in Russia as well as in America.

In a paper presented at the annual MB Convention in Moscow in 1925, Jakob Töws defined the work of the Reiseprediger simply as Reisepredigt, because, he said, it meant preaching while traveling. "By Reisepredigt," added Töws, "we mean the spiritual ministry among our Mennonite people that is not done by local preachers but by brethren who are traveling from place to place." The three components, according to Töws, are (a) evangelism with the aim of conversion; (b) special meetings for nurture and edification of believers; and (c) Bibelstunden for growth in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.⁷⁹

While the mission of the Reiseprediger was initially confined to Mennonite people, it soon broke out of this narrow mold and expanded far beyond their own communities.

⁷⁸ Bondar, Sekta, pp. 162-163.

⁷⁹ Jakob Töws, "Reisepredigt," Unser Blatt 1, No. 5 (February 1926), 98. This was the official organ of the Bundeskonferenz der Mennonitengemeinden der SSSR, published in Moscow during the early years after the Bolshevik Revolution.

In a special report reflecting on the first organizational conference of May 1872, Unger writes:

"Dear Brethren in Christ! Wonderful are the ways of our great God, and He leads all to a glorious conclusion. Now that our Einlage congregation has been in existence for ten years and the Molotschna congregation for twelve years, despite coming through many conflicts from within and without, these congregations are being regulated and grounded more and more on the basis of the Word of God. In this the brethren from abroad such as Benzien, Oncken and especially A. Liebig have been very helpful, for which we should be thankful to God and the loving brethren. Thus the grace of God has succeeded in calling to life, in Andreasfeld, an annual conference of all our congregations: from Einlage, Molotschna and the Kuban. With joy we recall the lovely days of May 14, 15, and 16 of this year [1872], where many brethren from near and far met to discuss the affairs of the Kingdom of God.⁸⁰

At this conference the Mennonite Brethren Church organized a Reisepredigtkomitee (Itinerant Preaching Committee) of seven members to initiate a new thrust in mission. Acting on behalf of the churches, this Committee employed and commissioned five evangelists: Eduard Leppke (Loeppke),⁸¹ a Baptist from Prussia who, like Karl Benzien, had joined the Mennonite Brethren Church;⁸² the others were Christian Schmidt, Johann Wieler, Aron Lepp, and Daniel Fast. Schmidt and Leppke received an annual salary of 400 Rubel each plus 50 Rubel for travel expenses,⁸³ while the other three received only 200 Rubel each because they "wished to pursue their earthly occupation in addition to proclaiming the Word."⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Friesen, Brotherhood, Document #207, p. 475.

⁸¹ Ondra, "Rußland: Drei Reisen," Missionsblatt der Gemeinde getaufter Christen 30 (1872), 137-142; cf. vol. 32 (1874), 213.

⁸² Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 476.

⁸³ Ondra, "Rußland," p. 140. Ondra mentions also an evangelist W. Schulz who received 400 Rubel, but Friesen's list makes no mention of him (Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 475-476).

⁸⁴ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 475.

The 1872 Convention placed the young Mennonite Brethren Church on the map of evangelical mission in Russia. For one thing, with the bold venture of the Reiseprediger the Brethren initiated a mission thrust which transcended all cultural boundaries within existing Mennonitism. Moreover, they became conscious of their financial stewardship responsibilities. Elder K. Ondra of Tiflis reported that they had donated 1,469 rubles for mission during the conference, and that one congregation of 262 members had collected 2,367.48 rubles for mission purposes the year prior to the conference. Furthermore, the focus of the speakers was on mission. Although a number of other topics were addressed, says Ondra, "the main theme was mission."⁸⁵

The record gives no detailed job description of the evangelists. Yet the term Reiseprediger carries the connotation of both movement from place to place and proclamation of the gospel. Such assignment inevitably involved adventure through travels, excitement through encounter with the unexpected, enrichment through experiences of ministry, as well as hardships and suffering because of the exposure to ridicule and persecution that comes with this kind of commitment.

Abraham Unger makes an interesting observation. The Reiseprediger had to keep a diary which was to be sent quarterly to the secretary of the Committee. The Committee in turn prepared a quarterly mission newsletter for circulation in all MB churches "in order that the congregations become aware of the labors of the brethren and that interest in mission be increasingly awakened."⁸⁶ From this objective it has been concluded that the itinerant ministry "stimulated soul-winning and a growing missionary spirit in the

⁸⁵ Ondra, "Rußland," pp. 139-140.

⁸⁶ Friesen, Brüderschaft, p. 394; cf. Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 476.

churches."⁸⁷ This is precisely what happened after 1872.

The minutes of the Convention held at Wassilewka in Charkow, September 14-16, 1918, give a detailed report of the extent to which the itinerant ministry had developed over the years and how it was carried on by the Mennonite Brethren at that time. The record includes the names of forty-four preachers who were to evangelize from one to two months each in thirty-seven different localities throughout Russia during the summer of 1919. Each preacher was paid from the Conference treasury established for that purpose.⁸⁸

It is exceedingly fascinating to read how the experiences and results of the Reiseprediger were communicated to, and received by, the local congregations. Even though the Reiseprediger were intelligent and eloquent men behind the pulpit, they were less gifted with the pen and rather modest on paper. Friesen's quaint observation reads like an anecdote:

We have to emphasize that, almost without exception, the itinerant ministers in their written reports underestimate their personal effectiveness, their penetrating eloquence in their sermons and their general activity. They were not men of the pen, and the Mennonite fears every exaggeration and every diffuseness of the written word. This fact is applicable to the vast majority of the reports, accounts, recollections, etc. of Mennonite Brethren. The Mennonite is the taciturn, reserved "Boer" with the exception of the fact that he does not fire guns or cannons; Boer and Mennonite also have the same ancestry, predominantly Dutch.⁸⁹

Despite the claim that the Reiseprediger were not great scribes, they diligently reported what God was doing in their own lives and through their ministry in the lives of

⁸⁷ Jacob J. Toews, "The Missionary Spirit of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia," in The Church in Mission: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to J.B. Toews, ed. A. J. Klassen (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature Mennonite Brethren Church, 1967), p. 144.

⁸⁸ Unruh, Geschichte, pp. 316, 320-321.

⁸⁹ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 515.

of others. Here is an account how the reports of the traveling preachers got to the people in the villages:

The rule was that they be sewn into a copybook and sent from village to village where members of our congregations lived in the two volosts of the Molotschna. Every village had to give a receipt as to when the notebook had arrived, when it was read to the brethren and sisters of one or several neighboring villages, and when it had been sent to the next village. The supervisor of this matter was the tireless regulator Br. Philipp Isaak, Tiege. He himself wrote both the circulation and the reading schedules found at the beginning of the well-sewn copy-books of the reports with home-made covers. It will also be of interest to many a person from the Molotschna to read the names of the villages in which, 1876-1877, the members of the M.B. churches lived: "Circulation schedule: Altenau, Muensterberg, Blumstein--Ohrloff, Tiege, Blumenort, Rosenort--Tiegerweide, Rueckenau--Kleefeld, Alexanderkrone, Neukirch, Friedensruh, Elizabethtal, Alexandertal--Pordenau--Grossweide, Pastva--Sparrau, Konteniusfeld--Waldheim, Hierschau, Landskrone, Gnadental, Gnadenheim, Alexanderwohl--Klippenfeld, Hamberg--Liebenau, Fuerstenau--Ladekopp, Muntau." The brethren and sisters will also put forth renewed efforts (or find it a joy) to read the reports of the itinerant ministers during the coming mission year, and therewith also help to further the work of the Lord through prayer and active involvement in giving, and then to send to each other the reports according to the given schedule in order that the brethren and sisters need not wait unnecessarily long for these blessings or be robbed of them entirely.⁹⁰

The numerical expansion of the MB Church during its first twelve years would not be very impressive to some contemporary missiologists who look at every mission situation with church growth spectacles. During the first year (1860) the church grew from eighteen to approximately 100 baptized members. During the next five years of persecution there was relatively significant growth. In the Molotschna alone the church baptized an average of fifty persons per year. But as soon as persecution subsided, the growth rate decreased as well, so that from 1866 to 1872 an average of only twenty-two believers per year were

⁹⁰ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 521.

baptized and taken into membership, bringing the total to 600 in twelve years.⁹¹

The Reiseprediger concept resulted in a healthy balance of quantitative and qualitative growth. From the first conference in 1872 to its twenty-fifth anniversary celebration in 1885 the MB Church had grown to approximately 3,000 members, of whom 1,800 had scattered in six different settlements throughout European Russia and about 1,200 had emigrated to North America.⁹² Peter J. Klassen speaks to the expansion of the MB Church in the following paragraph:

From its twenty-fifth anniversary until the outbreak of the First World War, the M.B. Church in Russia demonstrated dynamic growth. A new congregation was born on an average of every two years; expansion soon reached deep into Asiatic Russia. The well-established educational system was continued and strengthened, but was now supplemented by a number of Bible Schools or attendance at theological seminaries in western Europe. Periodical publications, such as Die Friedensstimme (The Voice of Peace) and the Christlicher Familienkalender (Christian Family Almanac) bound the far-flung congregations together, and provided a means whereby spiritual concerns could be shared. When World War I began, the Friedensstimme had almost six thousand subscriptions.⁹³

By 1925 the MB Church had grown to 8,518 adult baptized members, making up 22.5 percent or nearly one fourth of the total Mennonite population in Russia.⁹⁴

Under the Soviet regime the Mennonites entered an era of indescribable persecution and suffering. Churches were confiscated, Christians persecuted, teachers and leaders

⁹¹ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 468-469.

⁹² H. G. Mannhardt, ed., Jahrbuch der Altevangelischen Taufgesinnten oder Mennonitengemeinden (Danzig: Edwin Groening, 1888), pp. 73-74; cf. Ehrt, Mennonitentum, p. 61.

⁹³ Heinrich Woelk and Gerhard Woelk, A Wilderness Journey: Glimpses of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia 1925-1980, trans. Victor Doerksen (Fresno: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1982), p. 4.

⁹⁴ Ehrt, Mennonitentum, p. 61.

banished, many were executed or tortured to death and every kind of overt Reisepredigtdienst had to be abandoned.⁹⁵

Crossing Frontiers on Russian Soil

The history of Christian world mission is replete with examples where the missionary vision of certain individuals was much clearer than that of their constituencies. The same applies to the Mennonite Brethren in Russia, particularly in relation to frontiers on national turf. The question of mission work in foreign lands was settled much more readily, gaining the support of the churches from its very beginning. But that is a subject I will discuss later. Here the focus is on missionary challenge within the vast territorial and cultural expanses within the boundaries of greater Russia.

Amidst Opportunities and Dangers

Contrary to the opinion of the majority Mennonite Church that God had not yet unlocked the door to missionize among the peoples of the vast territories, the Mennonite Brethren believed that the time for both sowing and reaping had indeed come.

Although legally the doors were closed, missionarily they were open. There were two signs to indicate that. For one thing, the Russian people were both approachable and receptive to the gospel. The Mennonite Brethren interpreted this fact as an open door.⁹⁶ When they sowed the seed it fell on good ground and produced rich fruit. The extraordinary benevolence of Czar Alexander II (1855-1881) during the first generation of the Mennonite Brethren was seen as another sign. Not only had he expressed personal words of gratitude and recognition for deeds of

⁹⁵ Woelk and Woelk, Wilderness Journey.

⁹⁶ Gustav Warneck, Evangelische Missionslehre: Ein theoretischer Versuch, 2nd ed. (Gotha: Perthes, 1902), Vol. III/I, p. 146; cf. Vol. I, p. 262f.

compassion performed by the larger community of Mennonites toward soldiers and refugees during the Crimean and Russo-Turkish wars (1854-1856; 1877-1878); he had gone beyond such tokenism.⁹⁷ When the MB leader Johann Claassen distinguished himself as area administrator of the newly founded Kuban Colony, the Emperor awarded him a silver medal in 1872, followed by a gold medal in 1874.⁹⁸

Thus the response of the common people to the gospel on the one hand, and the congenial relationship between the Mennonites and the Czar on the other, may have lulled the young and missionarily zealous MB Church into thinking that all was well in Zion. But it was not. The legal prohibitions to missionize among Orthodox peoples had never been abrogated. On the contrary; with full approval of the Czar, the Holy Synod not only reiterated the religious laws with increased intensification, but was also consistent in their application. The Orthodox clergy perceived the Stundisten and Baptists as a threat to their own security. It was no secret that the Mennonite Brethren were in sympathy with these and other types of evangelical groups.⁹⁹

During the reigns of Alexander III (1883-1894) and Nicholas II (1894-1917), the laws became even more rigorous and explicit. The reverse reforms of these last two rulers of the Romanov Dynasty brought untold hardship on all sectarian movements. Children of mixed marriages with one partner being Orthodox were automatically, against the parents' will, registered as Orthodox.¹⁰⁰ Those who professed to be Stundisten were severely punished and the children removed from the parents. Evangelical worship services were forbidden. No Orthodox church member was

⁹⁷ Christian Neff, "Alexander II," Mennonitisches Lexikon, Vol. I, p. 21; cf. Lohrenz, "Mennonites," p. 176.

⁹⁸ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 474.

⁹⁹ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 527, 549; Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 73.

¹⁰⁰ Riasanovsky, Russia, p. 436.

allowed to give employment to a Stundist and no Stundist was permitted to rent property from anyone. Those who were found reading the Bible or praying outside of the institutional church were sent to Siberia without process of law. No funeral services were allowed to be held for the Evangelicals, nor were they permitted to bury their dead on cemetery ground.¹⁰¹

Local authorities had the law on their side and could wield their power as they saw fit. Paragraph No. 155 of an earlier (1871) penal code reads:

For the seduction of any Orthodox Church member to any other confession the guilty party will be condemned to the loss of all personal property as well as that of all rights and privileges, and will be exiled to Siberia or else sentenced to serve time in a corrective penal institution. . . . Those who have defected from the Orthodox Church and joined another confession, even though Christian will, in accordance with the same paragraph, be committed to the spiritual authorities in order to be exhorted, restored to reason and dealt with according to the ecclesiastical laws.¹⁰²

As soon as the Mennonite Brethren began to sow the seed of the gospel on Russian soil and to baptize converts from the Orthodox Church, the village priests sought to enforce these laws. And, paradoxically, the first wave of severe persecution occurred already under the benevolent reign of Czar Alexander II. He was no respecter of persons. The Mennonite Brethren missionaries faced the same danger as did the Stundisten or the Molokans, namely to be taken into "protective custody" behind monastery walls--never to be seen on the other side again.¹⁰³ Scores of believers were sent to Siberia, which one historian has described as "the place whither the Czar banishes capital criminals and offenders, never to return."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Lohrenz, "Mennonites," pp. 178-179.

¹⁰² Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 75; cf. Lohrenz, "Mennonites," p. 178.

¹⁰³ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 75.

¹⁰⁴ W. H. Parker, An Historical Geography of Russia (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), p. 128.

From all indications the Mennonite Brethren knew what they were doing. Their consistent and enduring missionary witness among the Russian people bears testimony to the fact that they were prepared to be more than a "missionary exemplar"; they were willing to become a "missionary victim," to borrow a paradigmatic phrase from David Bosch.¹⁰⁵ Since mission work among the Russian people was illegal and the risks were great, the Mennonite Brethren had to face the consequences of becoming the victim of the law. Yet they kept on sowing the seed of the Word despite high costs to themselves. Their sense of urgency of making known the Good News and their compelling missionary spirit moved them, as it did the apostles of the Early Church, to "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:20; cf. 3:19-20).

Mission Strategies and Methods

Both ingroup and outgroup historians have collected a wealth of documentary evidence that increases our understanding and appreciation for Mennonite Brethren mission among the peoples of greater Russia. They worked at different social levels and used a variety of means and methods.

Among working people. From the very beginning, the Mennonite Brethren exercised evangelism by life style at the grassroots level. "The seed of the gospel was carried into the Russian circles in a simple manner," notes one historian. He goes on to say:

The Russian people had been misguided by the Russian State Church in the way of work-righteousness. These works consisted primarily of accomplishments on behalf of the Church. The people had no concept of the grace of God in Jesus Christ and of the free redemption through faith. It must be said to the credit of the [Mennonite] Brethren that they helped them understand the meaning of the song so frequently chanted in the Orthodox Church: Hospodi pomiluj, "Lord, be merciful

¹⁰⁵ David J. Bosch, "The Missionary: Exemplar or Victim?" Theologia Evangelica 17, No. 1 (March 1984), 9.

to us". . . . The Brethren carried out their work with the deepest desire to lead the Russians to Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁶

The earliest channels they used were the networks of servant personnel working in Mennonite households, shops, and on farms. Bondar reports that Gerhard Wieler began his missionary activities by witnessing to Russian blacksmiths employed in Abraham Unger's shop in Einlage. In 1862, Wieler was accused of having baptized two Russian maids, Lakascheva and Orischkova, who were working in the Unger household.¹⁰⁷ There are reports of many other instances of witness, conversions, and baptisms. Lohrenz offers the following summary:

Many other instances of effective work among the native Russian population are evident. In 1863 Evrosina Morosowa, who had been employed by Henry Huebert, was baptized by a Mennonite minister, encouraged by the congregation of Liebenau of which Huebert and Benjamin Bekker were leaders. In 1862 Henry Neufeld, Abram Unger, Gerhard Wieler, and Peter Berg, all new Mennonites, were cited before the court for spreading sectarian, i.e., Mennonite, doctrine. Though the charge could not be proved, they were placed under strict police surveillance. In October 1863 Wieler baptized Mathvey Serbulenko, a Russian boy in the employ of new Mennonite Willms. On April 22, 1864, Wieler baptized twenty-two-year-old Andrew Pedacenko in the village of Einlage. For this deed Wieler was sent to prison in 1865. The other leaders remained under police observation. In June 1865 Peter Froese, also a new Mennonite, was cited before the court to answer charges of having influenced the Russian Jacob Sarany to leave the Orthodox Church.¹⁰⁸

Since many of the Russian workers moved annually with the harvest cycle from the south to the north of the country, they carried with them more than monetary compensation for their hire. German evangelical and Mennonite colonists

¹⁰⁶ Unruh, Geschichte, p. 265.

¹⁰⁷ Bondar, Sekta, p. 148.

¹⁰⁸ Lohrenz, "Mennonites," p. 179.

generally paid their workers well.¹⁰⁹ The Mennonite Brethren made an additional contribution. The vitality of their spiritual life left its imprint on the receptive workers, who in turn spread the Good News to their families and friends in Russian villages.¹¹⁰

Frontier of village mission. Bekker records in his diary that between 1861 and 1862 a great revival broke out in the Russian settlement of Ostriкова across the river on the north side of the Mennonite village Liebenau in Chortitza.¹¹¹ Wieler had again taken the initiative. The first prominent leader among the new converts was Demjan Wasezkij. From twenty to thirty-five new believers gathered in his home for prayer. As more and more people were converted the leadership circle extended, embracing men like Fjodor Wasezkij, Timotheij Akimanko, Alexandr Otscheretjko, and Ivan Tschernjawskij. These and others frequently attended the meetings of the MB Church in Liebenau for edification and instruction. Their special mentors were the Mennonite Brethren Gerhard Wieler, Jakob Reimer, and Johann Klassen. The evangelistic zeal of these young Christians was so intense that nothing could stop them from spreading their faith among their own neighbors in Russian villages.¹¹²

Thus the Mennonite Brethren soon found themselves deeply involved with Russian evangelicals who had a vision for mission among their own people. But up to this point they had no evangelical church which they could join. The

¹⁰⁹ Maria Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben: Erinnerungen aus dem Leben des Missionsdirektors Jakob Kroeker (Wüstenrot, Württemberg: Kurt Reith Verlag, 1949), p. 36.

¹¹⁰ Warns, Rußland, p. 96; Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, pp. 36-38.

¹¹¹ Bekker, Origin, pp. 98-99; Lohrenz, "Mennonites," p. 179; Unruh, Geschichte, pp. 94-95; Ehrt, Mennonitentum, p. 60.

¹¹² Bondar, Sekta, p. 157.

law neither permitted them to become Mennonites, nor to start a church of their own.

The ecclesiastical officials were exceedingly disturbed about the sectarian mission efforts and wanted to stop them at any cost. As they investigated and traced the revival to its origin, they discovered that it had had its beginning with Evrosina Morosowa who was employed and converted in the home of Heinrich Huebert.¹¹³ Their anger turned into fury. Evrosina was taken from Huebert's home and committed to the custody of her uncle. But all measures failed to stop the evangelistic witness and the spread of evangelical faith, as seen in the following quotation:

Because she had no parents, her uncle felt justified in adopting the role of father. He bloodied her back by flogging her and then hired her out in the village of Gnadenheim, where there was no trace of the Brethren. Her uncle believed that if she were removed from the Huebert home and placed in a village free from "heresy," she would forsake her "mistaken" beliefs. But he was mistaken in considering her belief a delusion. Her faith became stronger and more firmly grounded because of her beatings. She did not stop praying while in the service of her new employers. Her new hosts overheard her pray earnestly in secret. They eavesdropped several times and heard that she was also praying for them, her employers. Her mistress became curious and questioned her. The result was that her master and mistress were both saved. The conversions spread and reached her brother, who operated a liquor tavern. He was converted and discontinued his business. Through this the conversions spread in the village.¹¹⁴

The mood of the Mennonite Brethren in response to both the revival movement and the oppression is well expressed by Abram Unger of Einlage. In the April 1862 issue of the Quarterly Reporter published by the German Baptist Mission in America, Unger reminisced on his own experience:

Greatly did I rejoice that the poor Russians, who, as they themselves say, were formerly as stupid as the beasts, have now a clear understanding of the Word of God; they have given up image worship. Instead of drinking in the public-houses, they now assemble together every evening to read the New Testament and

¹¹³ Bondar, Sekta, p. 158.

¹¹⁴ Bekker, Origin, pp. 100-101, 170.

to give thanks to the Saviour who has opened the eyes of their understanding and given them faith for the remission of their sins. Truly, the Spirit of God is with them, and we see that our prayers have been heard, and God has come forth to have mercy on Russia.

The great enemy is already at work, and the preacher [Johann Wieler?] has been driven out from the village and is now taking refuge in my house; but we know that our God is for us, and He is greater than all those who can be against us! The names of all the converts, fifty in number, have been taken down by the civil authorities, and some have been arrested; but they answered the judges from the Word of God, proving that this is no new doctrine, but the oldest. . . . Pray with us, that the Spirit of God may give life to many more! For we believe that the hour has struck which shall be the "set time" to favour Russia, and that many thousands of her poor church and priest-ridden slaves shall taste the "liberty wherewith Christ makes his people free."¹¹⁵

Participation in revivals. From the very beginning the Mennonite Brethren often played leading roles in the revival movements and became instrumental in the formation of Baptist Churches, first in the Ukraine and Roumania, and then also in Russia proper. For instance, on July 11, 1869, elder Abraham Unger baptized the Ukranian Efim Cymbal in Alt-Danzig.¹¹⁶ In the fall of that same year, Cymbal in turn baptized the newly converted peasant Ivan Rjaboschapka (1815-1904), who is known as "the apostle of the Baptist movement in the Ukraine."¹¹⁷ Unger and his friends, particularly the Wieler brothers, Gerhard and Johann, probably baptized many more Russian converts than has ever

¹¹⁵ [Abraham Unger], "Fresh Intelligence from the South . . . of Russia," Reporter of the German Baptist Mission 17 (April 1862), 27. Although the article gives no author, the editor states in the introduction that the writer is the same as "the gentleman, a merchant, resident of South Russia" who wrote in the January issue of the Quarterly Reporter (No. 16, 1882, pp. 14-15) where Unger is identified as the author.

¹¹⁶ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 50; Ehrt, Mennonitentum, p. 60; Donat, Das wachsende Werk, pp. 169-170. Cf. footnote 73.

¹¹⁷ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 52; Kahle, Christen in Rußland, p. 37; Donat, Das wachsende Werk, p. 171.

become known, for neither the baptizers nor those baptized had much interest or liberty to talk about numbers. What is important is their widespread participation in the revival movements among the Russian peoples.¹¹⁸ These, however, were sporadic, and MB support was selective.

Mission Thinking at the Crossroads

The Mennonite Brethren were neither unanimous in their mission thinking after 1874, nor was their missionary road clearly marked on the map of the Russian frontiers. There were crossroads everywhere leading to unknown territory. While some ambitious leaders dared to tread wherever angels trod, others proceeded with fear and caution. This in itself gave rise to serious tensions, but for different reasons, as I will show shortly.

Individualism within the Brotherhood

The church always needs men with dreams and visions to forge creative tensions. But dreamers and visionaries sometimes tend to be individualistic and independent. They need the larger brotherhood for correction and direction, just as the brotherhood needs them for dynamic movement and action. The Mennonite Brethren in Russia had both, yet not always in appropriate proportion.

Towering among the early men of vision and mission was Johann Wieler (Wiehler),¹¹⁹ one of the five Reiseprediger commissioned at the 1872 MB conference in Andreasfeld. While working as deputy secretary in Odessa, Wieler had already been preaching among the Russians there. In 1870, this ministry resulted in a strong Baptist Church in the city.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 51-54; Donat, Das wachsende Werk, pp. 164-165.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Kahle, Christen in Rußland, pp. 40, 42, 47, 57, 66, 120; Missionsblatt der Gemeinde getaufter Christen 21, No. 2 (February 1863), 214.

¹²⁰ Donat, Das wachsende Werk, p. 174.

Wieler was a man of great eloquence and linguistic ability. He spoke with passion in his soul and fire in his voice. When he preached, people trembled. His greatest burden was the Russian and Ukrainian peoples. In 1882 he presented an ambitious magna charta to the MB convention held in Rückenau on the Molotschna. His agenda was that the Mennonite Brethren should assume responsibility for the evangelization of Greater Russia. In addition to fifty (or fifty-five) Mennonite Brethren delegates, there were Russian representatives, including Rjaboschapka from the young Baptist Church in the Ukraine and several leaders from the Caucasian region.¹²¹

At the next convention held in Friedensfeld in May of 1883, Wieler again asked the MB Church for blessing and support of his ministry among the Russian people. But all he got was opposition. The Brethren urged him to abandon his plans and to dismiss even the very idea of missionizing the Russians.¹²² The reason they gave was the legal sanctions against proselytizing among members of the Orthodox Church. Therefore, Wieler's efforts to get the Mennonite Brethren Conference intentionally involved in mission work among the Russians ended in failure.¹²³ Not only did the Conference withhold its support; it even reached the decision to hold Wieler personally responsible for whatever the consequences of his work might be.¹²⁴

Wieler looked for other ways of carrying out his evangelistic vision. Many individual Mennonite Brethren and some members of the Kirchengemeinde supported his cause both morally and materially. Wieler teamed up with Johann W. Kargel, Pastor and Bible teacher in St.

¹²¹ Ehrt, Mennonitentum, p. 60; Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 65; Bondar, Sekta, p. 154f.; Töws, Märtyrer, I, p. 29.

¹²² Unruh, Geschichte, p. 294.

¹²³ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 65.

¹²⁴ Unruh, Geschichte, p. 294.

Petersburg.¹²⁵ These two men gave themselves unreservedly to missionizing the Russian people. They called for another conference, which convened from April 30 to May 1, 1884, in Novowassilewka on the Molotschna.¹²⁶

This convention differed markedly from the one held in Rückenau two years earlier. While the former had been conducted in German, this one was completely in Russian and was dominated by Russian delegates. The chairmanship, however, was in the hands of Wieler and Kargel. It was at this conference that the foundations for policy and structure of the Russian Baptist Church were laid. It is of historical significance to note the role which the Mennonite Brethren played in founding the Baptist movement in Russia and the circumstances under which it took place.¹²⁷

Digression from the Mission Focus

It is obvious that Wieler's missionary vision and strategy had quickly expanded far beyond the horizon of his relatively young denomination. But the reasons why this was so are not clear, particularly in view of the zealous witness the Brethren had demonstrated among the Russians during the 1860s and early 1870s. What had happened, we must ask, that caused this apparent shift in mission focus among the Brethren? At least four factors must be noted, all having to do with the dramatic shift in the political climate of Russia and the Mennonite response to it.

¹²⁵ Not much is known about Johann Kargel, except that he was a great teacher of the Bible and, like Wieler, committed to evangelize the Russian people. Ehrt (Mennonitentum, p. 60) incorrectly refers to him as a Mennonite Brethren leader. His best-known work is Licht aus dem Schatten: Zweiunddreißig Vorträge über die Stiftshütte, die Opfer und das Priestertum (Danzig: M. Dannemann, 1896). Cf. Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 67.

¹²⁶ Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 66.

¹²⁷ Ehrt, Mennonitentum, pp. 60-61; Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, pp. 65-66; Bondar, Sekta, p. 159.

The New law of conscription. Barely had the Brethren begun learning to walk the missionary road in Russia when, along with other Mennonites, they suddenly found themselves between a rock and a hard place. According to the Imperial Charter of Privileges issued by Catherine I in 1763 and reaffirmed by Paul I in 1800, none of the Mennonites who either were living in Russia at that time or who might choose to settle there in the future, or any of their children and their descendents should "at any time be compelled to participate in the military or civil service, unless they specifically express a desire to do so."¹²⁸ But the new Ukas or Law of Russification of 1870 declared such eternal promises by former monarchs obsolete and abolished. After all, the present empire had aspirations for modernization. This political shift profoundly affected the Mennonites in terms not only of the religious distinctives of their Mennonitenum, but also the cultural idiosyncrasies of their Deutschtum. This meant that for the Mennonites the day of integration into the Russian way of life had arrived, and that the time of social, cultural, ethnic, religious, and political isolationism had ended. That was a sudden but simple historical reality.

The Fürsorge-Komitee at Odessa was to be abolished and the colonists were to be governed directly from Petersburg. . . . And worst of all for the Mennonites, military exemption was [also] to be abolished. The German Colonists were to be given ten years in which to accommodate themselves to the new order. After that they would become full-fledged Russian citizens with no special favors.¹²⁹

The handwriting on the wall was clear: the privileges given for eternity had been cut short by the realities of time. There was to be no more Mennonite autonomy with regard to education and their beloved German language;

¹²⁸ Friesen, Mennonitische Bruderschaft, pp. 99 and 492; Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 120 and 586.

¹²⁹ Cf. C. Henry Smith, Smith's Story of the Mennonites, 5th ed. rev. and enlarged by Cornelius Krahn (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1981), pp. 283-286; Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 586-590.

there was no longer any room for a Mennonite micro-state within the territories of the increasingly sociopolitical imperial macro-state. Thus when the rumors and rumblings of universal and compulsory military conscription rolled through the land, the Mennonites were not surprised, but they were greatly alarmed.¹³⁰ "Our hearts are deeply troubled," they wrote to the Czar, "that we should lose a significant part of our confession of faith, the article concerning non-resistance."¹³¹ They laid before the monarch their urgent petition for the preservation of the freedom of conscience, saying,

In the name of our Savior Jesus Christ, who through our fathers has given us the gospel of peace, who through His holy word commands us to follow in His footsteps in love, in the way of suffering and endurance, but not of war and that which is associated with it, we implore your Majesty most graciously to free us from military obligation, and we shall not cease to pray to our God and Lord to pour out the fullness of His blessing on the dear head of His anointed, and on the illustrious imperial household, and to protect our beloved fatherland from all war and misfortune, so that its well-being under the blessed and wise government of its beloved monarch may develop and be enduringly established evermore in peace.¹³²

Numerous written petitions to the Czar and at least three special deputations to St. Petersburg did not result in permanent changes; they only effected some "gracious concessions of the imperial government."¹³³ Yet their confidence in the Czar was sufficiently shaken to make a massive Mennonite exodus inevitable. Even Czar Alexander's personal attempt through his respected Adjutant General

¹³⁰ Reports of the British and Foreign Bible Society. Agents Book No. 125: Russia, March 28, 1871, pp. 323-324; Agents Book No. 137: Russia, May 4, 1871, pp. 47-48; Agents Book No. 149: Russia, April 7, 1874, pp. 320-322; May 15, 1874, p. 353; cf. Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 586, 588.

¹³¹ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 589.

¹³² Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 590.

¹³³ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 597.

(Count) Tottleben to dissuade them from leaving Russia was of little avail. By 1874, large groups of Mennonites were on their way to America.¹³⁴

Enforcement of russification. With the assassination of Alexander II on March 13, 1881,¹³⁵ the benevolent reforms in favor of the poor came to an abrupt halt. When Alexander III ascended the throne, he immediately introduced counter reforms. He again relied on the declining gentry for support, and firmly upheld what one writer terms "the banner of 'Orthodoxy-autocracy-nationality'" to enforce the program of russification initiated by his predecessors.¹³⁶ This meant increased pressure on non-Orthodox denominations, regardless of their origin; it also meant enforcement of the prohibition of missionizing efforts by anyone except the dominant Church. Even ethnically Russian sectarians such as the Molokans had to suffer great hardships.¹³⁷

The persecutions which followed Mennonite Brethren and other missionaries were severe. Johann Wieler was

¹³⁴ The great exodus of Mennonites from Russia lasted for seventy years (1873-1943). About 46,000, including many Mennonite Brethren, successfully emigrated to the Americas in three major waves: First wave 1873-1884: 18,000 left because of the Czar's military policies and settled mainly in the prairies of central Canada and the United States. Second wave 1922-1930: 20,000 escaped because of the Communist New Economic Policy and made their home mainly in Canada; some went to Brazil, Paraguay, and China; less than 500 settled in other countries. Third wave 1941-1943: 35,000, mainly women and children, fled during World War II to Western Europe, but only 12,000 eventually made it to Canada, Paraguay, and Uruguay; about 23,000 were expatriated by the Soviet army. Thus the MB Church was "providentially" transplanted to various parts of the world for missionary purposes. Cf. Dyck, Introduction, pp. 146-147; H. J. Willms, Vor den Toren Moskaus (Yarrow, B.C.: Columbia Press, 1958), pp. 45-71, 102-134; Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 592-597; Henry C. Smith, Smith's Story of the Mennonites, 4th ed., rev. and enlarged by Cornelius Krahn (Newton, KS: Mennonite Publication Office, 1957), pp. 517-519.

¹³⁵ Riasanovsky, History, p. 433.

¹³⁶ Riasanovsky, History, p. 433.

¹³⁷ Riasanovsky, History, p. 436.

constantly under surveillance by the Russian police and spent much time in hiding. But he considered his missionary calling more than a model; he was willing to be a victim. That meant fleeing from place to place and living as a martyr witness until his early death in 1889 while helping to build a house of worship in Tultsha, Roumania.¹³⁸ Throughout his adult life as a follower of Jesus, Wieler had not only learned the meaning of sowing seed on good soil: he had himself become a grain of wheat fallen into the earth dying in order to bear much fruit (John 12:24). His unique contributions to the Baptist movement in Roumania and Russia as well as his contacts with the German Baptists, helped to establish fraternal relationships between Mennonite Brethren and the Baptists in mission endeavors for years to come.

Mennonite spirit of patriotization. As I have shown, many nonresistant Mennonites were up in arms when word about compulsory military service reached them in 1871. Expediently they sent a delegation to St. Petersburg to remind the authorities of the Charter of Privileges. Unfortunately, their cultural isolationism had kept the majority, including many leaders, from learning the language of their country. Thus when the deputies in St. Petersburg had to have an interpreter to communicate with the Russian authorities, the Minister of Crown Lands abruptly but firmly declared their inability to speak the language as "a sin." The deputies apologized profusely and tried to explain that efforts were being made to correct their neglect. To this the Minister coldly responded: "Too late!"¹³⁹

Similar experiences were an embarrassment to the more enculturated Mennonites. Hence from 1874 to 1905 real efforts were made not only to learn the Russian language, but also to become patriotic citizens of their "dear

¹³⁸ Töws, Märtyrer, I, p. 30; Gutsche, Westliche Quellen, p. 67; cf. Missionsblatt 23 (1865), 156-157.

¹³⁹ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 587.

fatherland."¹⁴⁰ This is evident from the fact that all official church documents related to government issues were now composed in Russian at the congregational meetings and later translated into German for use in the larger church community.¹⁴¹ Many Mennonites became patriotic citizens who were proud of their beloved fatherland.

Reinterpretation of the laws. The Mennonites clearly saw the handwriting on the wall. Should they stay or should they leave? That was the big question for scores of them. There was no easy answer. The explanation given by Elder Abraham Schellenberg at the 1874 Convention in Andreasfeld is representative of those Mennonite Brethren (and other Mennonites) who left Russia for America between 1874 and 1884. Although Schellenberg was trying to calm the emotions and delay emigration for himself and others, he expressed his sentiments by saying that "whoever did not feel called to serve in Russia should emigrate; those feeling otherwise, should remain." Schellenberg himself emigrated to America in 1879. It was later stated, "God did not want him in Russia any longer; but used him much and long in America; this has been the verdict of history."¹⁴² That is to say that the role Schellenberg played in gathering and organizing the MB Church on the western side of the Atlantic can hardly be overestimated.

But there is another side of the story. The people who left Russia during this first wave of emigration were, according to Friesen, those with a "narrow Mennonite partisan tendency."¹⁴³ They were the ones who felt "conscience-bound to go" and thus left for America. But the majority felt "conscience-bound to stay" in Russia, assured that God had placed them there.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 604.

¹⁴¹ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 628.

¹⁴² Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 597.

¹⁴³ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 591, document #269.

¹⁴⁴ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 606.

Those who stayed refocused their energies and resources, turning from mission and evangelism among the Russians to duties toward the government, promotion of the Russian language and culture in schools, and mission in India rather than in Russia. Efforts were also made to contextualize and reinterpret the article on nonresistance to mean rendering to the government "obedience and honor according to God's explicit command."¹⁴⁵ Heretofore, wrote Elder Jakob Wiebe, "we were tolerated as a sect, now, however, we have become a recognized religious party whose unique confession of faith is totally secured by the law." He went on to predict "great things in this country [Russia] which the Lord of the Church has destined for greatness." While he saw "lightning flashing everywhere" as a harbinger of hardships, he firmly believed in better times ahead because, he said, "we are moving toward the Kingdom of God."¹⁴⁶

Obviously, not all Mennonites shared Elder Wiebe's Kingdom optimism for Russia and decided to seek their utopia beyond the shores across the seas. But the records nowhere indicate that their emigration was missionarily motivated. Religious convictions, cultural traditions, and economic conditions, seem to be in the forefront. If it were not for the sovereignty of the missionary God who rules in lives and movements of his people, the emigration might be hard to justify theologically. Yet when we consider the historical dispersion of the Mennonite Brethren Church and its expansion through the emigration into six or seven countries beyond the Russian borders, it is not hard to see as an act of God's sovereignty with a concrete missional intent. Whatever country they have come to, the Mennonite Brethren have visibly demonstrated not only their missionary dimension, but also their missionary intention in the midst of unmissionized societies and cultures. At the same time, God has not left himself without Mennonite Brethren witnesses

¹⁴⁵ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 605.

¹⁴⁶ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 607.

in the Soviet Union. Four out of five Mennonites in the Soviet Union today are Mennonite Brethren. The MB Church there numbers at least 32,000 members, is spiritually alive, and evangelistically active.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ The best account of the MB Church in the Soviet Union in our time is by Woelk and Woelk, A Wilderness Journey. See footnote #93 of this chapter. Upon his return from a visit to the church in the Soviet Union in September 1985, my colleague J. B. Toews reported at the Biblical Seminary in Fresno (September 24, 1985) that there are between 40,000 and 50,000 Mennonites in the Soviet Union, of whom 32,000 to 40,000 are Mennonite Brethren.

Chapter 7

MISSION THINKING IN TRANSITION

Second generation Mennonite Brethren were less sure of their steps on the missionary road than their founding fathers had been. The new political policies concerning military service, the emigrations to America, and the deliberate internal shift from social isolation to cultural integration impacted their mission thinking in no small measure. Only two major Conference decisions with regard to mission were made: the move to India in 1889 and the evangelistic thrust in Russia in 1906.

This is not to say, or even to imply, that the Mennonite Brethren in Russia were not involved in mission beyond these two incidents; they were very much involved. But their involvement was more through individuals, local churches, and churches in given areas than by united Conference action. Their mission thinking was in process and transition. The situation was both positive and negative. On the one hand, the process brought about a creative tension. On the other hand, most of the creative spirits among the Brethren found it necessary either to move beyond the parameters of the Conference to express their larger vision, or to go the independent road. They enjoyed the help of friends and local churches, but not the support of the Conference. Therefore, much of Mennonite Brethren mission thinking developed randomly in a disorganized way.

In this chapter I want to highlight two aspects of MB mission thinking in transition: (a) the extension of the gospel to regions beyond, and (b) renewed ventures of vision and faith on Russian frontiers.

Extending the Gospel to Regions Beyond

As the Mennonite Brethren missionary emphasis in their own fatherland decreased, the stress on foreign mission

increased, especially in relation to the mission work of the Baptists. There emerged, as it were, a mission interlude for India. The fact that the Kirchengemeinde had been missionizing in Java in cooperation with the Dutch Mennonites gave the Brethren added incentive to move with the Baptists to faraway places where laws would set no limits to their witness. As the missionary fires kindled the hearts of leading men and women, their vision for the lost world in distant lands gained ever clearer focus and "became the burden of their prayers,"¹ both in Russia and America.

Though cautious at first, the Mennonite Brethren eventually took a giant leap of faith, embarking on a course of foreign work that began to alter their philosophy of mission in no small measure. The heathen in regions beyond came into ever sharper focus, while the unevangelized peoples nearby shifted into peripheral vision. Geographical distance was seen as the major frontier to be crossed in order to carry on authentic mission work. Their compassion for lost and deprived heathen in distant lands gradually began to absorb much of their human and financial resources.

Theological Considerations

The Mennonite Brethren had for some time offered intercessory prayer "for the salvation of the heathen"; they had also collected and sent funds through European mission agencies for the support of indigenous ministers in other lands. But now there was a growing desire to send out their own missionaries to foreign places. Their conviction in this regard was christologically anchored. "Obedience to the supreme mandate of the departing, yet omnipresent and omnipotent Master," wrote missionary Abraham Friesen, "is the condition for his rich and blessed presence in the church of God by the Holy Spirit." A deep sense of Berufung to evangelize and of Sendung to missionize the unredeemed was seen as the criterion

¹ John H. Lohrenz, The Mennonite Brethren Church (Hillsboro, KS: The Board of Foreign Missions of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, 1950), p. 53.

of spiritual life and growth of the church. "As the ripples of water created by the throwing of a stone move from tiny to larger and ever larger circles," Friesen explained, "so must be the missionary activity of the believers: beginning 'in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth'" (Acts 1:8).² The awesome thought of the lostness of the heathen, and the omnipotent authority of the risen Lord inspired the Brethren with a sense of immediacy, urgency, and compulsion. The Lord of the Harvest was moving among them in marvelous ways. Therefore, God was affirming for them the direction of the Spirit in mission, noted Friesen. "We were compelled to go, regardless of whether or not we had any means at our disposal for the work; the Lord was simply too powerful."³

No one in the MB Church in Russia was in doubt about the verity of such a conviction. Small wonder, then, that before long a missionary offered himself for service in regions beyond the Russian lands.

First Missionary Candidates

When Abraham Friesen, son of a wealthy Mennonite Brethren industrialist, and his young wife made their conviction of God's call known to the church, the response was affirmative and warm. "We have been praying to the Lord for a long time," wrote one brother, believing "that He would make someone within the church willing to go as our missionary to the heathen."⁴ This was in the summer of 1885, the same year in which the Brethren in America founded a committee to manage

² P. M. Friesen, Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Russland (1789-1910) im Rahmen der mennonitischen Gesamtgeschichte (Taurien: Verlagsgesellschaft "Raduga," 1911; P. M. Friesen, The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910), trans. from the German by J. B. Toews et al. (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1978).

³ Friesen, Mennonitische Bruderschaft, p. 563.

⁴ Friesen, Mennonitische Bruderschaft, p. 560; cf. Brotherhood, p. 674.

mission funds. By fall, the Friesens left for Germany to study at the Baptist Theological Seminary in Hamburg.

Meanwhile, the Brethren were faced with the task of selecting the appropriate field. The problem was magnified by several factors: (a) They were unfamiliar with the world mission scene; (b) they had no structure of their own to commission someone to a foreign country; (c) they were inexperienced and ill prepared to launch an independent Anabaptist-type mission; and (d) they were of the opinion that the Dutch Mennonite Missionary Society would not serve their long-range vision for evangelism and church planting in a foreign country.⁵ Therefore, they decided to work alongside the Baptists.

Selecting a Mission Field

The correspondence between the Friesens in Hamburg and their home church in Russia reveals the intense nature of the process in reaching consensus on the choice of a field. Several stages can be discerned.

Initiative by missionaries. Nearing the end of his education, Friesen wrote to the elders of the Molotschna churches:

As you know, we are with this school year completing our preparation for work among the heathen. Consequently, we are compelled in all earnestness to search for a place of our future activity. Since we are not our own, but in the first place belong to our church and then to the larger community, we cannot undertake anything on our own until we have been accurately instructed as to what the brothers and sisters have in mind with regard to gentile mission: whether they merely wish to continue to make mission contributions as heretofore or intend to establish their own mission work. We are too weak to found our own mission. But we are in the position to develop a richly blessed activity among the heathen on a mission field of an Anabaptist-minded [Baptist] mission society.

⁵ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 674-676; cf. Jacob J. Toews, "The Missionary Spirit of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia," in The Church in Mission: A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute to J. B. Toews, ed. A. J. Klassen (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature Mennonite Brethren Church, 1967), pp. 148-150.

This can be achieved if we concentrate our hitherto divided energies on one single issue and send our own worker into the ripened harvestfield. If the mission friends of the Mennonite Brethren Church wish to start a mission work that will be lasting and fruitful, it will be imperative [a] that they undertake such a task at one place, in oneness of the Spirit, and united in strength; [b] that they carry it on prayerful hearts; and [c] that they support the same according to each one's ability. In this way the work can flourish, grow and increase, even if begun in a small way.⁶

The response of the church was warm and affirming. The leaders expressed full confidence in Friesen's decisions regarding the choice of a field. David Schellenberg, for example, wrote that he greatly rejoiced in the Friesens' readiness to serve their dear Lord among the heathen and that he appreciated their deep concern to discover the most appropriate way to do so. Elder Aron Lepp wrote in a similar spirit, rejoicing at Friesen's "perseverance and zeal to serve the Lord."⁷ Upon discussing the matter with the church in a brotherhood meeting on October 22, 1888, Elder Lepp wrote again and described the consensus reached:

The concern which you have presented to the Lord over an extended period of time is in full agreement with the wish of our congregation. The matter as to where you will be going we shall leave to the guidance of our dear Lord and to the counsel of the brothers [in Hamburg] who have experience in the area of mission. Thus I am here-with submitting to you the decision reached by our church who wants to have you as well as your beloved wife to work among the poor heathen; it is prepared to support you in the future according to its ability. May the gracious Lord grant you much joy and endurance for the newly started work and give clarity of direction as to where you ought to go.⁸

Declaration of a vision. Once the Friesens had spelled out their own commitment and received both endorsement and blessing from their home church, they declared their vision to work among the Telugus of Southern India. The American

⁶ Friesen, Mennonitische Brüderschaft, p. 561.

⁷ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 676.

⁸ Friesen, Mennonitische Brüderschaft, p. 562.

Baptist Missionary Union (founded in 1813) had started this work in 1836. Although at one time "the most hopeless," says an early report, it was "now the most prosperous" of all Baptist fields and "one of the most marvellously successful missions on the face of the earth." The report continues,

The history of Christianity in all ages and countries shows nothing which surpasses the later years of the American Baptist Telugu Mission in spontaneous extension, in rapidity of progress, in genuineness of conversions, in stability of results, or in promise for the future.⁹

Such encouraging information was helpful in reaching a conclusion concerning the choice of a field.

The elders assured Friesen that the church was entirely in harmony with his thinking, believing that the Lord was directing him. "Thus you may courageously go forward with the knowledge that you are not alone," wrote the elders. "You are accompanied by many a supplication and prayer for blessing on behalf of the poor [heathen] who are still dwelling in the shadow of death."¹⁰

Application to the Baptists. With the assurance of the church's support, the Friesens were ready to take the third step, namely that of applying directly to the American Baptist Missionary Union of Boston, Massachusetts. They asked the Union to accept them as missionaries of the church in Russia which was prepared to underwrite the financial support. The seminary administration of Hamburg as well as visiting professor Augustus Rauschenbusch of the Baptist Theological Seminary in Rochester, New York, recommended the Friesens to the Union and endorsed the working relationship between the Mennonite Brethren and the Baptists.¹¹

When Dr. Murdock, secretary of the Union, confirmed their appointment, the Friesens were delighted beyond words. They

⁹ Edwin Munsell Bliss, Ed., "The American Baptist Missionary Union," in The Encyclopedia of Missions (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1891), Vol. I, p. 51.

¹⁰ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 676; Mennonitische Bröderschaft, p. 562.

¹¹ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 676-679.

quickly finalized their decision to begin a work at Nalgonda among the Telugus in Hyderabad State in Southeast India. The rationale for the choice was twofold: (a) Because Nalgonda was a young field, and as new missionaries they would be able to develop and grow with the work; and (b) the Telugus of the area appeared to be ripe for harvest and thus attractive to young missionaries.¹²

Occupying the field of labor. The final step came for the Friesens in 1889. They left Hamburg in June for their home churches in Russia. After an extensive itinerant ministry during which they challenged the sending churches to greater awareness for foreign mission, they left for India on October 2, landing in Madras on December 5 of that same year. Their first task was language study in Secunderabad. "On October 25, 1890," wrote Friesen, "we finally settled permanently in Nalgonda to begin our glorious calling."¹³ Here they found "a large group of inexperienced Christians, and more than half a million heathen, many of whom--as experience had taught us--were hungry for the bread of life."¹⁴

Mennonite Brethren Baptist Mission Relations

The Mennonite Brethren Church of Russia and the American Baptist Missionary Union maintained a cordial and fraternal working relationship for many years.

The Mennonite Brethren considered it a privilege to work together with such established and experienced mission society as the Union was at that time. They took this move as the leading of the Lord and learned to think missionarily under the guidance and direction of a society that had proven itself to be fruitful and productive for at least seventy-five years, yet they were free to exercise their theological, ethical,

¹² Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 679.

¹³ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 680.

¹⁴ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 683.

evangelistic, and pastoral distinctives in building up the national church.¹⁵

The Baptist Union reciprocated appreciation and understanding. They expressed gratitude to the Mennonite Brethren for their contribution to the Mission, both personal and financial. There was also the understanding that, as long as the Brethren from Russia would supply personnel for Nalgonda, the Union would consider this to be their field and refrain from sending missionaries from America to the same place.

Missionary interest of the Brethren was significantly deepened when they were able to commission two new couples to the Nalgonda field: the Abraham Hüberts in 1898, and the Heinrich Unruhs in 1899. The Hüberts founded a station at Suriapett, southeast of Nalgonda, and the Unruhs established their work at Jangaon, northeast of the original field. When some congregations in Russia felt financially overstrained, the Baptist Union subsidized the MB mission treasury to relieve the Brethren of their felt burden and to protect the missionaries from undue monetary stress.¹⁶ Parenthetically, it is important to note that the Mennonite Brethren of North America were at the same time (1898) also sending one couple and a single lady as missionaries to Hyderabad State to work, if possible, in the vicinity of the Nalgonda field.¹⁷

The year 1900 was a high-water mark for early Mennonite Brethren mission in India. The Friesens had just returned to India from a visit to America. This visit had historical significance in that it brought into clear focus the vision of the American Baptist Missionary Union for cooperative mission; it confirmed the missionary zeal of the Mennonite Brethren in Russia; it even heightened the aspirations of the

¹⁵ Friesen, Mennonitische Brüderschaft, p. 564.

¹⁶ Friesen, Mennonitische Brüderschaft, p. 564; cf. pp. 566-567.

¹⁷ Lohrenz, Mennonite Brethren Church, pp. 230-232.

MB Church in America to pursue a "mutual longing to bring the saving gospel to the heathen."¹⁸ In order to maintain contact with the sending churches and deepen the missionary spirit among them both in Russia and America, the Brethren jointly began to publish a mission paper (1900) called Erntefeld (Harvest Field), which soon had 1550 subscribers. In addition, they distributed an annual publication entitled Unter den Telugus.¹⁹ These two publications kept the constituencies in Russia and America informed on what God was doing on the mission field.

An important event in the growth of the relationship between the Russian Mennonite Brethren and the American German Baptists occurred during the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1904, the Russian churches added Mr. and Mrs. Johann Wiens and Mr. and Mrs. Kornelius (brother to Heinrich) Unruh to their missionary staff. That same year the Russian Brethren reached an agreement with the Union that they would assume the cost for all evangelistic work, while the Baptists would be responsible for institutional developments such as maintenance of buildings, children's work, and medical care for the sick. In 1909 the Abraham Hüberts returned to India for a second term, accompanied by Anna Peters, a single missionary, and Mr. and Mrs. Franz Wiens.²⁰

Organization and Operation

The Mennonite Brethren in Russia and America attempted to organize a mission committee that would be in charge of their entire foreign mission program. But these attempts failed because of legal difficulties.²¹ The Brethren in Russia therefore established their own Heidenmissions-Komitee

¹⁸ Friesen, Mennonitische Brüderschaft, p. 563.

¹⁹ Friesen, Mennonitische Brüderschaft, pp. 564-565.

²⁰ Friesen, Mennonitische Brüderschaft, p. 564.

²¹ Friesen, Mennonitische Brüderschaft, p. 564, note #1; Abram H. Unruh, Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, Ltd., 1955), p. 331.

der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinden Rußlands.²² This Committee consisted of two components, one twelve-member Komitee in Russia with the Chairman, the Secretary, and the Treasurer making up the Executive Board, and a Zweigkomitee or Field Committee in India made up of the entire mission staff. This organization became somewhat of a model for the American Mennonite Brethren as I will show in Chapter 9.

Duties of the Mission Committee. The Komitee at home had multiple functions: (a) to receive and review applications from missionary candidates; (b) to accept and test recommendations relating to administrative changes; (c) to investigate possibilities of opening new fields; (d) to bring all recommendations before the Conference for ratification; (e) to nurture and promote mission interest within the churches; (f) to maintain active contact with the mission fields in order to understand existing conditions; and (g) to give an account of its own activities and a detailed report of its total mission operation to the annual conference.

Duties of the Executive Board. Each member of the Executive Board was entrusted with a special task, including that of guarding the relationship of the Brethren to the American Baptist Missionary Union. In addition, they had a corporate assignment: (a) to oversee the entire mission program of the Conference; (b) to carry out the resolutions and decisions of the Komitee; (c) to execute on behalf of the Komitee every type of contract and agreement related to the mission; (d) to administer all mission funds through the treasurer; and (e) to submit an annual budget to the Conference for approval.²³

Duties of the Field Committee. The Zweigkomitee in India was to oversee every phase of work related to its mission and to maintain a vital relationship with the home churches in

²² The complete document is published in Unruh, Geschichte, pp. 328-331.

²³ Unruh, Geschichte, p. 329.

Russia. Such matters as salaries, housing, and travel were constant items of concern and negotiation. In the event of a particular need, each missionary received special consideration. But in two areas the missionaries were left to cope on their own, namely in securing house furnishings and in caring for their health services.²⁴ Such a policy seems paradoxical, especially in view of the rather comprehensive and generous considerations covering other matters of missionary life and labor.

Qualifications of the missionaries. The requirements for a missionary candidate were generally high. Many para-church agencies in our time are less demanding than the Mennonite Brethren in Russia were a hundred years ago. Paragraph 15 of the "Operational Principles" sets out the following criteria governing the acceptance of missionaries: they must (a) be members of the Mennonite Brethren Church; (b) be compelled by the love of God to give themselves voluntarily for missionary service; (c) demonstrate a high level of spiritual maturity; (d) enjoy the trust and confidence of the larger brotherhood; (e) give evidence of natural giftedness to engage in foreign mission work; (f) have adequate educational preparation; (g) acquire a medical certificate, showing that they were in good health; and (h) have medical training if possible since such training was desirable--even indispensable--especially for women missionaries.²⁵

Basic mission philosophy. Abraham Friesen wrote that the Great Commission contained a twofold instruction with regard to approach and method: one, evangelistic, and the other, pastoral-didactic in nature. All other aspects of missionary work, such as healing, education, etc., were auxiliary means. Therefore, said Friesen, the chief concern must be the proclamation of the gospel.²⁶

²⁴ Unruh, Geschichte, pp. 330-331.

²⁵ Unruh, Geschichte, p. 330.

²⁶ Friesen, Mennonitische Bruderschaft, p. 565.

Friesen's view of mission is characteristic of MB mission philosophy through the decades. Functionally, the Mennonite Brethren have been quite wholistic in approach and method, focusing on the kerygma as well as on the diakonia and koinonia. But conceptually, they have never been able to reconcile fully the wholeness of the gospel without dichotomizing between proclamation and social concern. Evangelism and church planting have always received priority. But that will be the subject of later chapters, dealing with the American side of MB mission thinking.

Fruits and Frustrations

When the Friesens arrived in Nalgonda in 1890, there was no established church; there were only new Christians scattered in isolated hamlets, and about 700,000 non-Christians living in some 2,000 villages spread over an area of 6,000 square miles. But already on January 4, 1891, they organized the first church with 129 baptized believers. That same year, they baptized 178 new converts and the following year 109 more.

When the Friesens temporarily left India for health reasons in 1897, the church in Nalgonda had 700 baptized members, an indigenous self-supported leadership, its own meeting house, a school for boys and girls, a hospital, a plain but adequate family dwelling, and twenty preaching posts in outlying areas. In addition, the national believers carried out numerous services among women, youths, children, and the elderly.²⁷

The response of the Telugus to the gospel was most encouraging. Yet the work was not without problems. For one thing, there was an almost overwhelming sense of inability on the part of the missionaries and national leaders to provide adequate nurture and teaching for the massive influx of new converts. Because of this, many Christians were not sufficiently grounded in the Word and thus refused to have fellowship with believers of another caste. This experience taught

²⁷ Friesen, Mennonitische Bruderschaft, pp. 565-566.

the missionaries an important lesson. They baptized only as many converts as they were able to instruct in the teachings of Jesus and meaning of discipleship. This policy helped to overcome the problem of caste distinction among the Telugus.²⁸

They encountered a second problem. The Heinrich Unruhs had begun a work at Jangaon, a strategically located city along the railroad northeast of Nalgonda. Its location was advantageous, yet evangelistic work there was difficult. Western culture and "European paganism," as Friesen puts it, had made the people less receptive to the gospel. "The greed of the European merchant, the disrespectful and harsh treatment of the nationals by the European officers, and the dissolute life style of the European military made the name of Christ stink among the heathen."²⁹ This made work for the missionaries notoriously difficult, for they were often identified with Europeans.

A third hardship for both the missionaries and the young church resulted from frequent illness of the foreign workers. Between 1907 and 1910, one after another was forced to leave for Russia. "With great pain we had to tear ourselves loose from our work," wrote Friesen when he was forced to leave India with his family after nearly twenty years of hard and fruitful labor at Nalgonda. He also noted that Miss Katharina Reimer, a gifted and diligent school teacher, left with a "heavy heart the land she had learned to love." Yet she was too weak to stay. The same was true of Mr. and Mrs. Johann Wiens, teacher at the Baptist Theological Seminary at Rampatnam. They also experienced great pain when they had to leave India because of the grave illness of their daughter.³⁰

The hardest blow, however, came with the outbreak of World War I in 1914. The church in Russia was entirely cut

²⁸ Friesen, Mennonitische Brüderschaft, p. 566.

²⁹ Friesen, Mennonitische Brüderschaft, p. 567.

³⁰ Friesen, Mennonitische Brüderschaft, p. 567; Lohrenz, Mennonite Brethren Church, p. 55.

off from both mission and church in India. Even though funds were available in Russia, it was impossible to send them out of the country. This does not mean that the work of the Mennonite Brethren was abandoned; but the situation forced its amalgamation with the American Baptist Missionary Union. The Brethren in Russia found it hard to accept the fact that they were neither able to send out new missionaries nor to provide financial support for those still in India.

Upon an agreement between the Brethren in Russia and the Union in America that funds would be sent to the field treasury as soon as possible, the Baptists assumed full financial, moral, and spiritual responsibility for the entire mission of the Russian Mennonite Brethren in India. Because of political developments in Russia, that agreement was never realized. In the course of time the MB missionaries who were still on the field joined the Baptist Church. The painful consequences of this severance of relationship between the Mennonite Brethren in Russia and their missionaries in India became acutely evident some years later. When these missionaries came to visit the Mennonite Brethren in America they felt estranged, alienated, and unaccepted.³¹ They found no place to feel at home, either with the Baptists or with the Mennonite Brethren.

In conclusion it must be pointed out that nothing short of the marvelous grace of the Sovereign Triune Lord could have made it possible for the Mennonite Brethren Church of Russia to missionize in India under the sponsorship of the American Baptist Missionary Union for a period of twenty-five years (1889-1914). The price which the Brethren paid was high, but ungrudgingly paid. During this time they commissioned and supported seven missionary couples and four single ladies, and established three mission stations among the Telugu people in Hyderabad State. Missionary Heinrich Unruh died in India; Anna Epp transferred to the American MB

³¹ Unruh, Geschichte, p. 331; Lohrenz, Mennonite Brethren Church, pp. 55-56; Toews, "Missionary Spirit," p. 151.

mission when she married the missionary widower D. F. Bergthold. Three couples, one widow and two single ladies returned to Russia, and three couples and one single lady became members of the Baptist Church after 1914.³²

There was also pain involved. "When we think of the outcome of the Russian Mennonite Brethren mission to the gentiles," concludes Unruh, "then we must reiterate what the Apostle Paul once wrote: 'The Lord has hindered it.'"³³

Renewed Ventures of Vision and Faith

During the first quarter of the twentieth century the Mennonite Brethren renewed their vision and faith for world mission. Many ventured out in the spirit of a William Carey to "expect great things from God" and to "attempt great things for God."³⁴ The Conference moved ahead as a corporate body. Some men and women stepped out in faith as tentmaking missionaries by earning their own living. Others organized para-church structures to assist in their mission efforts. Still others had full support from local congregations. All of them, however, moved out of their home colonies, crossed frontiers in new directions, and witnessed in Russian villages.

The Expanding Church: A Denominational Move

The October Revolution of 1905 had a sobering impact on the Mennonites' "naive patriotism."³⁵ Many of their utopian dreams were shattered; they saw that the Kingdom of God was not as imminent as some had thought. It once again became clear to the Mennonite Brethren that they were called to be

³² Friesen, Mennonitische Brüderschaft, p. 568; Lohrenz, Mennonite Brethren Church, pp. 54-56; Toews, "Missionary Spirit," pp. 150-151.

³³ Unruh, Geschichte, p. 331.

³⁴ Quoted by Bliss, Encyclopedia of Missions, Vol. I, p. 234.

³⁵ Friesen, Geschichte, p. 628.

a missionary people on Russian soil. Their young men had had visions and their old men had dreams to evangelize Russia. But the Conference as a corporate body had not yet caught that same vision with the same intensity. The church had sent missionaries to India since 1889, but had not yet done the same for Russia. The witness to Russian neighbors had been left for individuals and local congregations who might support their missionizing members in tangible ways. All that was about to change.

In June 1906, the Conference took positive action to intensify and expand its missionary intention in Russia. The Brethren elected a committee and appointed a team of three evangelists to work among the Russians. Within two years the Conference had recruited and commissioned nine missionaries,³⁶ and by 1910 the number had climbed to eleven.³⁷

According to a report by Gerhard Fröse, secretary treasurer of the newly organized committee, the MB missionaries worked in close harmony with Russian evangelicals and spoke of their work as "evangelism" rather than "mission."³⁸ The Friedensstimme (official Mennonite Brethren organ since 1903) describes these efforts as both intense and fruitful.

Already during this year of 1910 we have experienced remarkably great blessings when many people in Varvenkova [Barwenkovo] were converted to the Lord. The Spirit of God is at work among the Russians in Varvenkova, even if, in our opinion, rather slowly. The Russian believers hold their Sunday meetings at the home of a certain brother Goluba. How great will be our joy once we will be in the position to build a beautiful house of prayer for the Russian brethren in Varvenkova [in the Charkow province]!³⁹

With the eruption of World War I, the Revolution of 1917, and the mass exodus of Mennonites to Canada in the

³⁶ Unruh, Geschichte, p. 258.

³⁷ Wilhelm Kahle, Evangelische Christen in Rußland und der Sowetunion (Wuppertal und Kassel: Oncken, 1978), p. 54, note 10.

³⁸ Unruh, Geschichte, p. 258; Kahle, Christen in Rußland, p. 56.

³⁹ C. D. Bondar, Sekta Mennonitov u Rossiya (Petrograd: Tipographiya B. D. Smirnova, 1916), p. 181.

1920s, the whole mission scene of the Mennonite Brethren took on new dimensions.⁴⁰ Not the corporate Conference, but highly motivated individuals carried the burden of mission and evangelism on behalf of the Mennonite Brethren in Russia.

The Zeltmission: A
Martyr Witness

The Mennonite Brethren played a significant role in the All-Russian Tent Mission during an era of political crisis and anarchy. The idea grew out of the Soldatenverein, an organization of Christian soldiers founded by Mennonite conscientious objectors serving in the medical corps during World War I. Its sole purpose was to make known the claims of Christ among Russian soldiers and Mennonite medics. Members of the Verein witnessed by word and deed. They cared for the sick and wounded and distributed New Testaments and other evangelistic literature. From this small beginning emerged the Zeltmission with the expanded vision of taking the good news into the hamlets and homes of the soldiers' families.⁴¹

Missionary Jakob Dyck (1890-1919) was the leader in these ventures. While studying engineering in Berlin prior to World War I, Dyck was converted under the powerful preaching of Johannes Warns, founder and director of the Berlin Bible School (now Bibelschule Wiedenest). Constrained by love and compassion for people, Dyck became an active member in the YMCA, an experience that prepared him for evangelistic work in the Russian army. "Love is a centrifugal force," he said, always moving the Christian witness from the believing center

⁴⁰ Cf. Unruh, Geschichte, pp. 334-367.

⁴¹ H. H. Goossen, Adolf Reimer: Ein Treuer Bote Jesu Christi unter Deutschen und Russen (Yarrow, B.C.: Columbia Press [1960]), p. 30; Aron A. Töws, Mennonitische Märtyrer der jüngsten Vergangenheit und der Gegenwart, 2 vols. (Winnipeg: Selbstverlag des Verfassers, Vol. I, 1949; Vol. II, 1952), Vol. I, pp. 130-133; John A. Toews, A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church: Pilgrims and Pioneers, Ed. A. J. Klassen (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1975), p. 117.

in the church to the unbelieving circle in the world.⁴²

The Zeltmission operated in three phases.⁴³ The first phase was simply a continuation of the Soldatenverein, with a shift in focus from the soldiers in the army to the civilians in town and country. As soon as the peace treaty went into effect after the February Revolution of 1917, the armies disbanded and the soldiers went home. "We must follow them into the villages," said Dyck. And follow they did.⁴⁴

Their decision coincided with a number of events that temporarily impacted the preaching of the gospel in Russia in no small measure.

1. The victory of the revolutionary forces had dealt the deathblow to the Czarist Regime.

2. The fall of the Czar as head of the old political and ecclesiastical order resulted in abrupt separation of Church and State and the abolition of anti-Protestant laws.

3. The Provisional Government headed by A. F. Kerensky, though insecure and short-lived, proclaimed religious liberty to all.

4. The Orthodox Church was now helpless and without power to persecute the Evangelical movements.⁴⁵ Dyck and

⁴² Toews, History, p. 117; Töws, Märtyrer I, p. 133.

⁴³ Existing records about the Zeltmission are fragmented. Cf. Töws, Märtyrer I, pp. 130-136; Unruh, Geschichte, pp. 275-279; Toews, History, pp. 116-117; Goossen, Adolf Reimer, pp. 30-32; J. I. Regehr, "Die Zeltmission: Aus meinem Tagebuch," Mennonitische Rundschau 107, No. 21 (October 1984), 12-13; Abram Kroeker, Unsere Brüder in Not! Bilder vom Leidensweg der deutschen Kolonisten in Rußland (Striegau: Urban, 1930), pp. 78-83; Abram Kroeker, Bilder aus Sowjet-Rußland, 3rd ed. (Striegau: Urban, 1930), pp. 13-18; N. I. Saloff-Astakhoff, Christianity in Russia (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1941), pp. 98-100.

⁴⁴ Töws, Märtyrer I, p. 133; cf. Unruh, Geschichte, p. 275.

⁴⁵ Saloff-Astakhoff, Christianity in Russia, p. 98; Nicolas Zernov, The Russian Religious Renaissance of the Twentieth Century (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 192-193; cf. E. Damson, "Gibt es in der Sowjetunion nur Verfolgung?" Licht im Osten, February 1986, pp. 8, 17-19. Comparing present conditions with those under Czarist Russia, the author states: "Die Verfolgung der nichtorthodoxen Gläubigen unter verschiedenen Zaren stand der heutigen nicht nach" (p. 8).

others hailed these events "as the dawn of a new day of religious freedom and of new missionary opportunities."⁴⁶

The Evangelicals were optimistic. Finally free "from the oppression of Church and State, [they] lifted up their heads and preached the gospel throughout the whole land."⁴⁷ The new government supported their evangelistic zeal. Indeed, there was an "interval of freedom," as one Russian historian puts it.⁴⁸ Although it lasted only a few months (March-October 1917) and is the only one on record in Russian history since the days of Peter the Great, it appeared to be real at the moment.

But their optimism and vision gave rise to an immediate concern: how should they accommodate the large crowds they envisioned thronging to their meetings in towns and villages? This concern gave birth to a novel idea of purchasing a tent.⁴⁹ That would allow them to move from place to place in order to preach the gospel and offer medical care to thousands throughout their giant fatherland.⁵⁰

In May 1917, they put up their first tent in Central Russia. The people were open and receptive to the gospel.⁵¹ Although organized by the Mennonite Brethren under Dyck's leadership, the early phase of the Mission was not only ecumenical in spirit and structure, but also wholistic in

⁴⁶ Toews, History, p. 117.

⁴⁷ Saloff-Astakhoff, Christianity in Russia, p. 98.

⁴⁸ Zernov, Russian Religious Renaissance, pp. 187-209.

⁴⁹ Goossen reports that the Brethren purchased a large tent in 1917 (Adolf Reimer, p. 30), while Töws writes that they received five tents from the Red Cross (Märtyrer I, p. 133). Regehr states ("Die Zeltmission," p. 12) that the government gave them the tents. It appears that for the first phase they did, indeed, buy a tent which they left behind when that phase was terminated. Cf. Goossen, Adolf Reimer, p. 30; Töws, Märtyrer I, p. 130.

⁵⁰ Kroeker, Bilder, p. 13; Unruh, Geschichte, p. 275.

⁵¹ Töws, Märtyrer I, p. 130; cf. Saloff-Astakhoff, Christianity in Russia, pp. 98-99.

emphasis. Its workers came from Mennonite, Jewish, Lithuanian, and Russian backgrounds. One of the leaders noted:

The members of the Mission divided into small groups, to make up small choirs, in which preachers, medical workers and others took part. These small groups went from city to city, from village to village, preaching the glad news of salvation, distributing spiritual literature, and helping the sick and needy by free medical care of the many who were destitute, and giving any other assistance they possibly could.⁵²

But with the October Revolution and the severity of winter the first phase had to be abandoned--tent and all.⁵³ The Brethren, however, remained hopeful and optimistic.

The second phase was set in motion the following year. Two major problems had to be resolved: first, securing legal permission from the new government; second, finding another suitable tent. The church called for prayer and fasting on behalf of the mission. Dyck went to Moscow to apply for a permit and order the needed tents. He was treated most cordially by Russian officials. The Mission was registered as "Zeltmission zur Evangelisation im Süden Rußlands" and the tents were given to him gratis. "Our Father is rich in treasures and gold," he gratefully exclaimed as he went home with permit and tents.⁵⁴ The Brethren took this to mean that God was on their side as they launched the second phase of the Mission.

The next step was recruitment. When the church called for volunteers, twenty-two young men and women, mostly teachers from the Molotschna, responded at once. But they needed training in evangelism. The leaders designed two courses, one for beginners, the other more advanced. Three

⁵² Saloff-Astakhoff, Christianity in Russia, pp. 99-100.

⁵³ The record is unclear as to the dates. The reference to the "October Revolution" would imply that it was 1917. But there are also indications that the termination of phase one was in 1918 (cf. Töws, Märtyrer I, p. 130).

⁵⁴ Dyck got the tents either from the government or from the Red Cross (cf. Regehr, "Zeltmission," p. 12; Töws, Märtyrer I, p. 133).

Russians (V. E. Bukow, N. I. Saloff-Astakhoff, and O. Juschkewitsch) and five Mennonite Brethren (I. P. Regehr, J. G. Thiessen, J. J. Dyck, H. Enns, and A. Nachtigal) served as teachers. Each forenoon the missionaries received instruction on (a) how to witness to nominal Orthodox Christians; (b) how to counsel those interested in becoming followers of Jesus Christ; (c) how to study the Bible in a meaningful way; and (d) how to communicate the gospel most effectively both in private and in public. In the afternoons the students dispersed into villages to share their faith, help peasants and others with their work, and invite people to the evening meetings.

On June 6, 1919, the training sessions were completed. The Mission leaders had selected Panjuntino, a strategically located town near the central railroad station of Losowaja in the Charkow region, to set up the tent. From this center they spread out in all directions. The sponsoring churches were as enthusiastic about the Mission as the missionaries themselves. They supplied free room and board, assisted with transportation and met other needs.⁵⁵

The evangelistic zeal of Evangelicals in general was at an all-time high. On streets of towns and cities, in public halls and open parks, in theatres and railroad stations, on board ships and trains, and in factories and shops, notes Saloff-Astakhoff, one could hear the tunes of gospel songs and the sound of gospel preaching. He adds:

There are no foreign missionaries in Russia, but everyone who is truly born again is a missionary and may witness for the Lord where he or she is. Among the people, so weary and tired from war and conflict within and without, there was evident a great spiritual hunger and thirst.⁵⁶

Despite such favorable reports, the sun began to set on the Zeltmission. "The message of salvation was not always

⁵⁵ Regehr, "Zeltmission," pp. 12-13; Unruh, Geschichte, p. 275.

⁵⁶ Saloff-Astakhoff, Christianity in Russia, pp. 98-99.

well received," we read in a missionary's diary. There were interruptions and resistance, sometimes resulting in physical violence among the listeners.⁵⁷ Then, too, the Red and White armies, who were still at war, threatened to eliminate any kind of activity contrary to their objectives.

But the gravest danger was posed by the terrorizing and murdering army of 6,000 bandits under the command of Nestor Ivanovich Machno.⁵⁸ They ravaged and raped, tortured and killed. The Mennonites responded with organized Selbstschutz or self-defense. Machno vowed revenge.⁵⁹ The last meeting under Dyck's leadership was held in Dubowka, the village Eichenfeld, on October 26, 1919. Five of the missionaries, including Dyck and Juschkevitsch, were literally hacked to pieces by the swords of Machno's bands. Some eighty other villagers met a similar fate that same day.⁶⁰ Thus the second phase of the Zeltmission ended in blood and tears. Martyr witnesses had become martyr victims.

The third phase began the same year. The tragic events of the times could not keep the Brethren from evangelizing. But it did weaken their deliberate mission focus and had adverse effects on the diminishing mission force. This called for reorganization of the Zeltmission under Russian leadership. Its new president, N. I. Saloff-Astakhoff, describes an episode from the third phase of intensive preaching and evangelism:

A group of young people, carrying banners with various Scripture verses like, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin," went singing through

⁵⁷ Regehr, "Zeltmission," p. 13.

⁵⁸ For a complete story see Victor Peters, Nestor Machno: Das Leben eines Anarchisten (Winnipeg: Echo Verlag [1970]).

⁵⁹ John B. Toews, Lost Fatherland: The Story of the Mennonite Emigration from Soviet Russia, 1921-1927 (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1967), pp. 35-39; Regehr, "Zeltmission," p. 13; Kroeker, Bilder, pp. 16-17; Abram Kroeker, Meine Flucht: Erfahrungen unter der Sowjetherrschaft, 6th ed. (Striegau: Urban, 1931), pp. 25-37; Kroeker, Brüder in Not, pp. 78-86.

⁶⁰ Regehr, "Zeltmission," p. 13; Goossen, Adolf Reimer, p. 30; Unruh, Geschichte, pp. 275-279.

the city toward the park. A large crowd joined the procession. When they came to the park thousands of soldiers gathered around them, besides the large crowd of people from the city. As the speaker stood there on a box, which served as a pulpit, there was a vast sea of human faces before him, all listening with intense interest. At the end of his message he put a question before the multitude: "Daily you hear the call to follow the one or the other political party," said the young Christian. "Today you have heard about the Lord Jesus Christ, His claims, and His call. Who of you desires, and would be willing, to follow Him whole-heartedly from this moment on?" Thousands of hands went up in quick response, and a dead silence prevailed for several minutes while the whole multitude stood there with uplifted hands. This was an overwhelming manifestation of the spiritual hunger in the hearts of the Russian people.⁶¹

According to the new director, there emerged a purified Christian church after the model of the early Christians. While there had been only about one-half million Protestant Christians at the beginning of the war, by the end of the war and revolution, about three million people had professed conversion and joined Protestant churches.⁶²

That is not to say that the Zeltmission deserves all the credit for such astounding growth of the church in Russia. It was the Spirit of God that empowered the gospel of salvation to transform Russian people in large areas of the land. But the expanded vision of Jakob Dyck and others was contagious. They loved, but not their lives.

"Licht im Osten": A
Kingdom Vision

None of the Mennonite Brethren missionaries has played such time-transcending and ecumenical role as Jakob Kroeker (1872-1948). He was a man with missionary compassion and academic erudition, working as evangelist and teacher, theologian and preacher, author and publisher, organizer and administrator. His vision encompassed the Kingdom of

⁶¹ Saloff-Astakhoff, Christianity in Russia, pp. 100-101.

⁶² Saloff-Astakhoff, Christianity in Russia, p. 101.

God, and his theology could not be confined to a Mennonite village.⁶³

Kroeker was raised in the atmosphere of traditional Mennonite piety and legalism. These, rather than experiential knowledge of the life from God, were considered the marks of godly living.⁶⁴ When he was twelve years old itinerant evangelists from other colonies preached the gospel at Spat and Tokultschak in the Crimea, where the Kroeker family lived. Dr. Baedeker and others had distributed gospel tracts in Mennonite homes. As a result of these activities, in 1883-1884, revival fires swept through the colony like a mighty wind of God, touching both adults and children. It was a time, notes one writer, when a number of persons found "forgiveness and peace through faith in the blood of the Lamb."⁶⁵ Jakob Kroeker and Antje Langemann were among the young converts.⁶⁶

The revival sparked a new missionary vision for the world. During the winter months, church women met in sewing circles, read missionary reports and letters, and fashioned a variety of handcrafted articles to be sold at the Missionsfest in order to raise money for mission.⁶⁷ Interest in Baptist mission work in India reached an all-time high during the 1880s and 1890s. Although this work was under the supervision of the German Baptists of Boston, U.S.A., the Mennonite Brethren in Russia had taken full ownership in 1889 when Abraham and Maria Friesen were commissioned as

⁶³ Hans Brandenburg, Jakob Kroeker: Ein bevollmächtigter Bibelausleger (Stuttgart: Evangelischer Missionsverlag, 1957).

⁶⁴ Brandenburg, Jakob Kroeker, p. 7.

⁶⁵ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 552; Maria Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben: Erinnerungen aus dem Leben des Missionsdirektors Jakob Kroeker (Wüstenrot, Württemberg: Kurt Reith Verlag, 1949), pp. 22-24; Brandenburg, Jakob Kroeker, p. 7.

⁶⁶ Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, pp. 24-25; Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 551-552.

⁶⁷ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 680.

the first MB missionaries to India.⁶⁸

When Kroeker was a young teacher he heard the Friesens speak at a Missionsfest in Spat. He was moved by what they said and sensed God's call to missionary service in India. As he shared this with the elders they offered to send him to the Baptist Seminary in Hamburg for missionary preparation at the church's expense.⁶⁹

Soon thereafter Kroeker married Antje Langemann and the young couple left for Hamburg.⁷⁰ Their goal was India, but God's was Russia. Kroeker's health prevented them from going overseas. After four years of studies in Hamburg, they returned home.

The church recognized the gifts of the young couple and on May 24, 1898, ordained Kroeker as preacher and co-elder. His first major assignment was the position of associate Reiseprediger. This meant that he would travel in company with the eminent Mennonite Brethren educator, Bible teacher, and "prince among preachers," elder David Duerksen (Dirksen).⁷¹

Being himself of humble birth, Kroeker felt at home among the peasants and the common folk. But he moved with equal ease and grace among the Russian aristocracy in St. Petersburg. God allowed Kroeker to exert a profound influence on those who helped to rule the nation prior to the Revolution.⁷²

Initially, their missionary journeys took Duerksen and Kroeker to distant Mennonite colonies of the Samara and Ufa provinces west of the Ural Mountains and to the settlements

⁶⁸ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 680.

⁶⁹ It is interesting to note that the Mennonite Brethren sent their missionary candidates to train at the Baptist Seminary in Hamburg, whereas the General Conference Mennonites had their candidates trained at the Missionshaus in Barmen.

⁷⁰ Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, p. 29.

⁷¹ Unruh, Geschichte, p. 174; Toews, History, p. 83; Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, pp. 29-30.

⁷² Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, pp. 52-61; Kahle, Christen in Rußland, pp. 58-59.

of Aulieata in Central Asia. Kroeker also travelled to isolated villages of Schuscha deep in the Ararat Mountains on the Persian frontier where the Polish Count Felician Zaremba (1794-1874) had preached in exile. Here for the first time Kroeker came face to face with the reality of the martyr witness under oppressive conditions. Here he also learned to praise God together with victims suffering for their faith.⁷³ This experience however created tension in his soul. On the one hand there was growing Mennonite patriotism; on the other hand there was increasing injustice on the part of the government toward Christians. But his vision to evangelize Russia remained unblurred.

Quite early in life, Kroeker discovered his talent as a writer. And so did his cousin Abram Kroeker,⁷⁴ who had served a Baptist church in Roumania as Mennonite Brethren preacher. The two cousins formed a team and "attempted to build the kingdom of God through the publication of the Christian Family Almanac Calendar [German and Russian] as well as the Christian family periodical Friedensstimme and other devotional publications."⁷⁵ Their pioneer venture gradually developed into a major publishing concern known as Raduga (Rainbow), established at Halbstadt in the Molotschna in 1908.⁷⁶

In subsequent years, the Kroeker cousins worked in partnership with Russians and Germans alike, and became widely known for their publications. Of special significance in theological circles is Jakob Kroeker's eight-volume magnum opus, under the general title, Das lebendige Wort, a

⁷³ Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, pp. 31-33.

⁷⁴ Kroeker, Meine Flucht, pp. 12-20; Brandenburg, Jakob Kroeker, p. 8.

⁷⁵ Friesen, Brotherhood, pp. 554-555; Kroeker, Meine Flucht, p. 13; Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, pp. 41-43.

⁷⁶ Friesen, Brotherhood, p. 555; Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, pp. 43, 48; Brandenburg, Jakob Kroeker, p. 8.

theological work on the Old Testament.⁷⁷

On his travels Kroeker met many Russian and international leaders of the larger Christian community. These meetings resulted in crossfertilization and mutual influence. His own life was greatly enriched, his theological vision stretched, and his ecclesiastical horizon expanded far beyond that of his own denomination. He worked in concert with spiritual giants of the land and those from Western countries living in St. Petersburg. Kroeker wrote:

Here for the first time the idea dawned on me that our salvation which we have in Christ means infinitely more than merely "being saved," and that its deepest essence is intimate and childlike communion with God in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Henceforth there was opened to me a Church of Christ the very essence of which knows no confessional boundaries and the life of which is the life of Christ in us.

Here for the first time I learned to know my [Christian] brother in the light of the work which God has performed in him and not in the light of ecclesiastical dogma.⁷⁸

A highlight of Kroeker's missionary experiences in St. Petersburg took place at the Easter Conference of 1905. As I have pointed out earlier, the persecutions of the Christians--particularly the Stundisten--under the Czarist regime had been fiercely cruel in every respect.⁷⁹ The most subtle tactics were designed and carried out by Konstantin Petrowich Pobedonostsev (Pobjedonowszew), a devout churchman, loyal nationalist, brilliant Professor of Civil Rights at the University of Moscow (1869-1880), and for twenty-five years (1880-1905) effective Minister of the Interior, covering the

⁷⁷ Jakob Kroeker, Das lebendige Wort, 8 vols. (vols. 1-4, Giessen: Brunnen Verlag, 1931-32; vols. 5-8, Wernigerode: Verlag "Licht im Osten," 1925-29).

⁷⁹ Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, p. 51.

⁷⁹ Hans Brandenburg, Christen im Schatten der Macht: Die Geschichte des Stundismus in Rußland (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1974), pp. 92-96, 111-118, 120-122; Johannes Warns, Rußland und das Evangelium: Bilder aus der evangelischen Bewegung des sogenannten Stundismus (Cassel: J.G. Oncken Nachf., 1920), pp. 112-130.

last year of Alexander II, the reign of Alexander III, and the first eleven years of Nikolaus II. Pobedonostsev single-handedly shaped the course of the Russian Church and Empire during the transitional period from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries.⁸⁰ Ironically, this coincided with what I have referred to as the period of patriotization in Russia.

But after Russia's humiliation in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, the voice of the people became a bold cry for liberation. The February Revolution of 1905 was a warning to the Czar as well as to the Orthodox Church that the power of the masses had become imminently explosive, unless major changes would be forthcoming.⁸¹

Under these circumstances, Czar Nikolaus made the clever decision to proclaim a surprise Manifesto of Religious Toleration. This was to be read by the clergy in all the churches throughout the empire at the special Easter service on April 16, 1905. Kroeker was conference speaker in St. Petersburg. On the eve before Easter, Princess Lieven, in whose castle the conference was held, invited speakers and guests for an Easter prayer service. Kroeker reports:

Very early a group of invited guests appeared in the castle hall, asking themselves: What might be the reason for a gathering at such an unusual hour? But no matter whom we asked, no one knew the answer. Only that much was said that the Princess was to read a Manifesto from the Czar.

Suddenly, the door opened, and the Princess entered the hall. She was in white attire, wearing a crown on her head and holding the imperial edict in her trembling hands. Deeply moved, she read the glad tidings of the Manifesto. It was an indescribable moment! Even before the [church] bells began to ring and the public was aware what good news was to be proclaimed, we were already on our knees thanking God for liberating the Russian people from enslavement. It seemed as though no eye stayed dry and no lip remained silent. We were particularly mindful of the release of thousands upon thousands of our

⁸⁰ Brandenburg, Christen, pp. 114-117.

⁸¹ John Shelton Curtiss, The Russian Church and the Soviet State 1917-1950 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1953), p. 10; Brandenburg, Christen, pp. 124-125.

brothers and sisters who had endured incredible suffering for the sake of their faith.⁸²

In view of this experience, Kroeker believed that his vision for the evangelization of Russia could be realized. He "dared to hope," he wrote in Die Sehnsucht des Ostens. He was convinced that the church of God in Russia was facing for the future a mission field as attractive and as large as the scope of history heretofore had never known.⁸³ Kroeker translated faith and hope into action of love and compassion. One of the men who fully identified with his aspirations was Walter Jack, a young Reformed theologian who in 1906 had come from Germany to Russia in order to work among the Stundisten in St. Petersburg and Moscow.⁸⁴

Their major project as an expansion of the publishing house Raduga was a Diakonissenhaus in Halbstadt, Molotschna. Its explicit purpose was to train nurses for hospitals and deaconesses for spiritual and social ministries in Russia and other lands.⁸⁵ They intentionally demonstrated that the Kingdom is greater than the church and the world larger than the Mennonite colonies. But their vision was too big for the circumstances in which they operated and the circle of supporters who stood with them.

As they searched for a new base of operation, Kroeker and Jack decided to move from Russia to Germany. In 1910 they completed the transition and settled in Wernigerode of the Hartz region.

But neither his home church nor the Russian Christians could understand this move. At times Kroeker was unsure himself whether he was really in the will of the Lord.⁸⁶

⁸² Brandenburg, Christen, pp. 125-126; cf. Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, pp. 59-61.

⁸³ Jakob Kroeker, Die Sehnsucht des Ostens (Wernigerode A.H.: Verlag Licht dem Osten, n.d.), p. 5.

⁸⁴ Brandenburg, Christen, pp. 142-145.

⁸⁵ Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, pp. 61-63.

⁸⁶ Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, p. 66; Brandenburg, Jakob Kroeker, p. 10.

One senses that mood of groping uncertainty in the lines of a poem he penned at that time. In the following excerpts, Kroeker simultaneously prays and confesses, saying,

Lord, give me your hand that it may lead me
Out of my groping, erring, into paths of thine.
For all my longing, searching--also finding--
When viewed in light eternal, it's my own design.
Although by many a refreshing fountain
I hoped to drink from their renewing streams;
Yet what I tasted was like bitter waters--
Left thirst unquenched and hopes as unreal dreams.

Lord, give me your hand that it may fill me
With treasures vital that neither wilt nor disappear.
O let me labor, bearing fruit of thy good Spirit
Which will outlive our battle, test and fear.
While in this world let be my life an emblem
Of thy great Kingdom where thy power reigns;
Where thy rich grace from guilt and sin redeems us,
And where thy weakest servant eternal blessing gains.⁸⁷

God answered Kroeker's prayer and provided him with a field of labor, which bore fruit through His good Spirit.

During World War I, millions of Russian prisoners of war came under German occupation.⁸⁸ After the war, scores of refugees poured into Germany from Eastern Europe.⁸⁹ And during the Russian-Polish war of 1920, another 50,000 soldiers and officers came to the Continent.⁹⁰ Kroeker and Jack now clearly heard the Macedonian call from many quarters, "Come over and help us."⁹¹ They saw in this not only a tremendous challenge to exercise Christian love and compassion,⁹² but also the most inviting opportunity for the open door to bring the gospel to the Russian Orthodox people.⁹³ This was the historical moment when divine rays of hope and salvation could penetrate the human realms of conflict and

⁸⁷ Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, pp. 67-68.

⁸⁸ Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, p. 79.

⁸⁹ Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, p. 79.

⁹⁰ Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, pp. 92 and 98.

⁹¹ Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, p. 78.

⁹² Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, p. 97.

⁹³ Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, pp. 98-99.

confusion, darkness and despair.⁹⁴ They saw God at work in all of this. "Our soul knows of no higher aspirations," wrote Kroeker, "than to stand in the center of divine action and events, and to witness of the creative and life-giving power of God's grace."⁹⁵

With the help of Swedish believers, notably the aristocratic circles of the YWCA, and the contributions of the American YMCA, Kroeker and Jack were able to involve themselves heavily in wholistic ministry among Russian prisoners and refugees.⁹⁶ Because of their command of the language and their intimate acquaintance with the soul and spiritual need of the Russian people, Kroeker and Jack were in great demand. They conducted Bible studies and seminars among new converts, not knowing what the end results might be. They organized the mission agency, Licht dem Osten with a motto taken from the words of Paul: "For we do preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord" (II Cor. 4:5). Their goal was to establish neither Kroeker's Mennonite Brethren nor Jack's Reformed Church, but the Kingdom of God among the Russian peoples. To symbolize that goal they published their mission organ entitled, Dein Reich Komme. This is still one of the most reliable sources that reports of Licht dem Osten, an effective work among believers in Communist countries of the Soviet Republics.⁹⁷

There was a moving of God's Spirit in prisons and refugee camps. Everywhere were great revivals. Thousands of soldiers and army officers were converted in prison camps and hundreds received Bible training through the evangelistic and educative efforts of Kroeker and Jack. When they returned

⁹⁴ Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, pp. 78 and 100.

⁹⁵ Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, p. 78.

⁹⁶ Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, pp. 100-101.

⁹⁷ Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, p. 80. The publication, Dein Reich Komme, is part of the archival collection of the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno, California.

to Russia, each soldier received a New Testament and other pieces of Christian literature with the imprint on the cover, "Warmest greetings for your homeland."⁹⁸

The returning prisoners of war became the missionaries to Russia. As a result of their testimony a mighty religious revival broke out, "moving like a river of great blessing throughout Russia's expansive lands."⁹⁹ Kroeker's vision for evangelizing Russia was more effectively realized than he could ever have imagined.

Men of Passion: Compelled to Saving Souls

Although the Conference put forth renewed efforts between 1906 and 1910, it failed to sustain corporate momentum on Russian soil. For the most part the work was done by individual pioneers and pathfinders who worked on all levels of the social strata. Some received only moral support from the Conference, but no material reward for their labors. Others ventured out in faith as tentmaking missionaries. Then there were those who were supported by their home churches, while still others relied on the goodwill of friends and para-church agencies. Yet all of them were highly motivated evangelists, driven by a passion to save souls for the Kingdom.

A brief sketch of the labors of a selected few will shed some light on the tensions that existed between the Conference and its independent missionaries.

First, there was Jakob Wall, a Bible colporteur for the British and Foreign Bible Society. Toward the end of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, Wall carried on extensive evangelistic work among Russian soldiers in combat lines. Two years later, Wall moved to Siberia. He continued his work there until 1929 when the family and many others were forced to seek temporary refuge in China. Eventually, they came to South America. Wall reported from Argentina:

⁹⁸ Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, p. 98.

⁹⁹ Kroeker, Ein reiches Leben, p. 167.

Our Russian mission work was extensive. About one hundred [Baptist] churches emerged in West Siberia alone. At first our headquarters were Omsk, but later we moved to Nowo Sibirsk. From time to time I was privileged to serve in this great ministry and the Lord blessed our efforts with many conversions. To Him be the glory.¹⁰⁰

But why did a Mennonite Brethren evangelist not build MB churches? One of two answers may be given. Either Wall's ecclesiology was like that of Jakob Kroeker, transcending all denominational lines in favor of a Kingdom theology, or it was shaped by the broader Mennonite mindset, fearing loss of privileges in the event that Russian converts join the Mennonite Brethren Church. Wall's own records are silent on these issues.

A second man of passion was Adolf Reimer (1881-1922). As grandson of the great preacher Martin Kalweit, Reimer became a missionary of extraordinary stature. Several marks of his work are noteworthy. For one thing, he was equipped with the charisma of an evangelist. Already during student years he was evangelistically active among fellow students, and at the age of twenty-two he began to evangelize in Russian villages. In 1905 he, together with other MB leaders, founded a Russian Baptist Church in the Mennonite colony of the Molotschna. Since the law prohibited Russians to be baptized outside the Orthodox Church, the Brethren administered believers' baptism at night in a river near the village. The new Christians were officially welcomed into fellowship by other members. They observed the Lord's Supper together, and then dispersed to their respective homes before day-break.¹⁰¹

In the second place, Reimer was remarkably ecumenical in his missionary thinking. This had both positive and negative effects. Initially, he worked within the MB Church context, but his vision transcended that of his church. Like

¹⁰⁰ Quoted by Unruh, Geschichte, p. 279; cf. Gerhard Fast, In den Steppen Sibiriens (Rosthern, Saskatchewan, n.d.), p. 74.

¹⁰¹ Unruh, Geschichte, p. 267; Goossen, Adolf Reimer, p. 16; Kahle, Christen in Rußland, p. 55.

other MB missionaries of the time, Reimer rejected the narrow exclusivism so prevalent with Mennonite Brethren. Contrary to their practice, he had no objection to observing the Lord's Supper together with Christians who had been baptized by a mode other than immersion. He felt at home in the alliance churches and on one occasion requested that they lay hands on him as a symbol of identification with them.¹⁰²

For several years, Reimer was editor of a Russian family almanac and other Christian literature published by Raduga. Here he met the renowned Ivan Stepanovich Prochanov, a member of Raduga since 1909, and later the prominent leader of the All-Russian Union of Evangelical Christians.¹⁰³ In 1910, Prochanov and others opened a Bible school in St. Petersburg and called Reimer to become one of the first teachers. This move brought him in contact with the Russian elite and leading evangelical theologians.¹⁰⁴

But Reimer's ecumenical leanings had some negative repercussions:

1. The MB Conference "dropped" him as its missionary, withdrew all support, and left the man with a growing family materially impoverished.¹⁰⁵

2. An independent MB Association for the Support of Mission among the Russians was organized to help people like Reimer. But the Association had inadequate resources and accumulated monetary indebtedness to Reimer. This left Reimer financially again on his own and resulted in unresolved tensions with MB mission.

3. While teaching in the Bible school, he eventually joined the All-Russian Union of Evangelical Christians in Leningrad (formerly St. Petersburg). This was a greater loss to the Mennonite Brethren than they realized at first;

¹⁰² Goossen, Adolf Reimer, p. 17.

¹⁰³ Kahle, Christen in Rußland, p. 55.

¹⁰⁴ Goossen, Adolf Reimer, pp. 18-21.

¹⁰⁵ Goossen, Adolf Reimer, pp. 17-18.

although Reimer maintained vital contact with them until his dying day.¹⁰⁶

Thirdly, Reimer was a man of unwavering persistence in evangelism. Throughout the years of war, revolution, conflict, and Machno terrorism, he "continued to evangelize among soldiers in combat. He faced terrifying conditions when Mennonite villages were occupied and homes turned into army quarters. Rape and plunder, terror and murder were daily occurrences. His own father was murdered, his grandfather Kalweit shot while preaching to Red soldiers, and his brother Jakob killed while praying in kneeling position.¹⁰⁷ In the midst of all this Reimer remained fearless, driven by only one passion: "To save souls from eternal damnation." When warned of pending dangers, he responded, "Brethren, even the Reds have a soul which longs to be saved and we must preach the gospel to them."¹⁰⁸

Finally, Reimer was a man who stood in the gap. When Jakob Dyck and several missionaries of the Zeltmission were executed by Machno bandits in 1919, he called together the survivors and their families to comfort and encourage them. In order to continue the work under Russian leadership, Reimer organized a "Wandering Bible School," designed specifically to prepare new missionaries to take the place of the martyrs. The school was unique in that the teachers went to the students instead of the students coming to a stationary school. This was an early version of Theological Education by Extension long before the idea of present-day TEE had been conceived. The school resulted in a spiritual awakening and a renewed missionary thrust among the Mennonites, especially in the Molotschna colony.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Kahle, Christen in Rußland, pp. 28-29; Goossen, Adolf Reimer, pp. 18-19.

¹⁰⁷ Unruh, Geschichte, p. 269.

¹⁰⁸ Unruh, Geschichte, p. 268.

¹⁰⁹ Unruh, Geschichte, p. 273; Kahle, Christen in Rußland, pp. 56-57.

During the great famine of 1921-1923,¹¹⁰ Reimer made his last missionary journey. Its purpose was more didactic than evangelistic; he wished to nurture new believers in their faith. As he was physically and emotionally exhausted, he fell prey to the deadly typhoid epidemic which in some areas left insufficient numbers of people alive to bury the many dead. A young man of only forty-one years, Reimer died on May 18 1922.¹¹¹ On his grave is this epitaph: "Oh Lord Jesus, how simple is your gospel and how great your grace."¹¹²

A third man to be named here was Heinrich J. Enns, the son of an itinerant preacher living in Schönfeld (Brazol), about fifty kilometers east of Chortitza and the same distance north of the Molotschna. His interest in mission among Russians developed through the Soldatenverein while he served in the medical corps during World War I.

When the call for new workers of the Zeltmission went out to the churches, Enns and his sister immediately joined. Here he also met Reimer and other leaders of the Evangelical movement of Leningrad.¹¹³ All shared one common passion: evangelism. There was a feeling of urgency in the atmosphere which called for total involvement as long as the doors remained open. Although the times were clearly out of joint, more was done in the area of mission during this time, notes one writer, than at any other time in Russian history.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ For a complete report on the great famine among the Mennonites in Russia see David M. Hofer, Die Hungersnot in Russland und unsere Reise um die Welt (Chicago: K.M.B. Publishing House, 1924).

¹¹¹ Goossen, Adolf Reimer, p. 32. The date of Reimer's death as given by Unruh, Geschichte, p. 273 and the statement that "Der Fleckentyphus raffte ihn 1921 hinweg" appear to be incorrect. Cf. Kahle, Christen in Rußland, p. 55. I accept 1922 as given by Goossen, Reimer's biographer and brother-in-law, as authentic.

¹¹² Töws, Märtyrer I, p. 70.

¹¹³ Unruh, Geschichte, pp. 273-274; Töws, Märtyrer I, pp. 190-191.

¹¹⁴ Waldemar Gutsche, Religion und Evangelium in Sowjetrußland zwischen zwei Weltkriegen (1917-1944) (Kassel: Oncken, 1959), pp. 22-23; cf. Unruh, Geschichte, p. 274; Töws, Märtyrer I, pp. 191-192.

But this heyday of mission was short-lived; it lasted only as long as it took the new government to consolidate its forces. As soon as the Soviet Regime was in full power every type of Christian propaganda was prohibited under the penalty of death. Scores of preachers and religious workers were dragged into court and sentenced to prison, exile, or execution.¹¹⁵ The determination of the Communist Party to eradicate the Christians may be illustrated by a few excerpts from a speech given by a Red Army official at a religious meeting held in 1919 in Balaschow of the Saratov province. "You Christians," he declared, "you have had 2000 years of time to build your kingdom of God. But what have you given to the world?" He paused for a moment, then added both a historical and prophetic commentary with reference to the war and its aftermath: "Your deeds have been blood, tears and starvation! Your time is now over and ours has come. We have arrived and will henceforth take the destiny of humanity in our hands."¹¹⁶ These words were no empty threat to either the MB missionaries or the rest of the Christians in the Soviet Union; they became stark reality as soon as they had been spoken.

Every Christian leader, from the highest Patriarch Tikhon and the members of the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church¹¹⁷ down to the common preacher of the Mennonite Brethren, became victims of the new religious laws. Enns was one of those victims. He felt compelled to carry on the work which Reimer had barely begun. In 1922, he was summoned to appear before the Soviet court. When the sentence was read, Enns faced five

¹¹⁵ Unruh, Geschichte, p. 273; Matthew Spinka, The Church in the Soviet Union (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 29; Töws, Märtyer I, pp. 192-193.

¹¹⁶ Gutsche, Sowjetrußland, p. 31.

¹¹⁷ After the fall of the Romanov Dynasty in March 1917, and the fateful consequences of the October Revolution and the execution of the Czar in that same year, Tikhon was named the first Patriarch to head the Russian Orthodox Church since 1721 when Peter the Great had placed the Church under the administration of the Holy Governing synod over which the Emperor wielded enormous power. See Spinka, The Church in the Soviet Union, pp. vii-xi, 3-50.

years in prison plus five years in exile outside the Ukraine. His family was stripped of all privileges and rights as citizens. After a miraculous escape, Enns found refuge in the Caucasus, where he continued his mission activities covertly, but only for a short time. Like his predecessor, he fell prey to typhoid and died in 1922, at the age of thirty-four.¹¹⁸

Finally, mention must be made of Heinrich P. Sukkau. With only seven years of elementary schooling, this peasant evangelist became a renowned missionary. Like Elisha of old, he was called from plowing the field to preaching the Word (I Kings 19:19-21). Little is known about his background, except that he was born in South Russia and later moved with his parents to New Samara, a Mennonite colony some 1,400 kilometers northeast of the Molotschna.¹¹⁹ He tried farming, but he had no land of his own and found it hard to support his family. Convinced of God's call, he sold what he had and moved to the city. He aspired to perfect his Russian language by focusing especially on biblical vocabulary and idioms. Thereafter he preached the gospel with astounding effectiveness. Wherever he spoke, people were converted to Jesus Christ.¹²⁰

His fame spread far and wide and invitations came from all parts of the Soviet Union, including churches in Siberia. Young and old thronged to hear him. Many times people would request that he start all over again after he stopped preaching at nine or ten o'clock in the evening. It was not unusual for the meetings to last until two o'clock in the morning; frequently people insisted that he preach until day-break. On one occasion Sukkau complained about the hard task of preaching to the Russian people because, he said, they

¹¹⁸ Töws, Märtyrer I, p. 193.

¹¹⁹ Töws, Märtyrer I, p. 123; Unruh, Geschichte, p. 269.

¹²⁰ Töws, Märtyrer I, p. 124; Unruh, Geschichte, pp. 269-270.

are "so sehr heilbegierig" (so very eager for salvation).¹²¹

He emulated Paul's missionary methods in all his travels. He was perceptive to cultural circumstances, adapted to economic conditions, and remarkably sensitive to the needs, views, and customs of the people where he preached.¹²² Indeed, he could say with Paul:

To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it. (I Cor. 9:22-23 NASV)

Although Sukkau was Mennonite Brethren, he had neither the support of a mission committee nor the backing of the Conference. He ventured out solely on faith and lived by his motto: "A Christian must have an unshakable trust in God."¹²³ Nothing seemed impossible to him with God. When he needed a pair of warm boots in order to accept a call to northern regions in the midst of winter at -38°C temperatures, he said to God, "I am your servant. If you want me to accept that invitation and work in those churches then give to your servant the needed Burrstiefeln [high and warm boots], for without them I cannot travel in this cold weather." He got the boots.¹²⁴ Many similar "miracles" have been recorded about the mission ministry of Sukkau.¹²⁵

As the pressures of persecution intensified, mission work became increasingly difficult. It was also hard to see ever larger numbers of Mennonites emigrating to America. Sukkau was also tempted to leave. But after discussing it with the Russian believers he decided to stay. After all, he had been called and chosen to be a shepherd and bishop of

¹²¹ Töws, Märtyrer I, p. 124.

¹²² Unruh, Geschichte, p. 271.

¹²³ Töws, Märtyrer I, p. 126.

¹²⁴ Unruh, Geschichte, p. 270.

¹²⁵ Unruh, Geschichte, pp. 270-271; Töws, Märtyrer I, pp. 124-126.

some ninety isolated Slavic congregations.¹²⁶

The price he paid was very high. He was banned to a concentration camp where he shared the fate of suffering for the gospel with two other Mennonite Brethren preachers, Johann J. Töws of Ignatjewka¹²⁷ and David D. Pätkau of Orenburg. Neither Sukkau nor his fellow prisoners ever returned to freedom.¹²⁸

Tribal Frontiers: Rethinking Mission

During the years of patriotization of the Mennonites in the 1870s, the Mennonite Brethren had shifted their focus from mission work in Russia to foreign mission in India.¹²⁹ But with the outbreak of the war in 1914, that work had to be aborted. This caused the Brethren to undergo a complete rethinking of mission. "As the connections with India were cut off," says one writer, "individual Brethren turned their eyes to the spiritual need of our brothers in the land."¹³⁰ Mission-minded members from both Mennonite Brethren and General Conference Churches pooled their resources, formed a joint treasury, sponsored Russian village evangelists, and conducted gospel meetings among the Russians of Koschki. In 1917, they supported Jakob Hein as full-time missionary. But when no new missionary could be found to replace Hein after his death in 1921, the government requisitioned the meeting house and this work was also terminated.¹³¹

In the meantime, the Brethren heard the Macedonian call of the Mordvine tribe, "Come over and help us." Although they

¹²⁶ Unruh, Geschichte, p. 271; Kahle, Christen in Rußland, p. 56.

¹²⁷ Töws, Märtyrer I, pp. 47-56.

¹²⁸ Töws, Märtyrer I, pp. 141-143.

¹²⁹ See this study, Chapter 6, p. 266f.

¹³⁰ Jakob Töws, "Bericht über die Missionstätigkeit der marientaler Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde in Alt-Samara," Unser Blatt 3 (December 1925), 45; Unruh, Geschichte, p. 349.

¹³¹ Töws, "Bericht," p. 48; Unruh, Geschichte, p. 350.

experienced severe setbacks during the great famine of 1921-1922, indigenous evangelists and Mennonite teachers continued joint efforts in evangelism and Christian nurture. By 1924 their work had spread to five villages of the Mordvines and to two cities of Russian inhabitants. The more they concentrated on work among Russian peoples, the more they saw the tremendous need, the great harvest field and the insufficient number of workers. One leader wrote:

Overwhelmed by a deep sense of inadequacy, we can do only one thing: Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into his harvest field. . . . It has been by grace that we were able to do a little bit of work. But the Lord, whose eyes are like flashing fire, knows how much we have missed, neglected and spoiled by our selfishness and impropriety. O that he would be gracious towards us rather than judge us.¹³²

Although the records of the mission are incomplete, they do reflect both the missionary dimension and the missionary intention of the Mennonite Brethren during the early years under Communist rule.

Another focus was directed to the tribes of the far north. The story reads like Luke's report of Paul's missionary journeys. It is filled with episodes as hazardous as those recorded by Paul himself. Like Paul, these missionaries were constantly

in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers . . . dangers from the Gentiles . . . dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, . . . in labor and hardship through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, cold and exposure. (II Cor. 11: 26-27)

A German missionary by name of Benzien, a former prisoner of war, had been working among the various tribes along the Ob River and its tributaries for some time. He visited Mennonite Brethren and other churches to report of his work. His passionate plea for workers did not fall on deaf ears. Among the first to respond were Johann Peters and his wife. They sensed God's call and volunteered to be

¹³² Töws, "Bericht," p. 48; Unruh, Geschichte, p. 351.

tentmaking missionaries in the northern regions. There were more than twenty unreached tribes who had never heard the gospel, wrote Peters in 1925.¹³³

Mr. and Mrs. Peters, Johannes Kehler, and Helene Peters were the first MB missionaries. They worked together with Paul Beer and his wife from Germany among the Ostjakes, the Tonguse, and the Samojedes. After six years of hard labor, self-support, evangelistic witness, and church planting, and thousands of miles of missionary travels by water and by land, the Peterses decided to take their five children and visit the home churches in the Slawgorod area of Siberia. They reported of the grace of God in their own lives and what God had done through them among the tribal peoples. Their appeal was as simple as their passion and love for the lost were compelling and genuine. They said to the churches:

Since we have had the gospel for so many years while the tribes of the north have been overlooked, it is our responsibility to fulfill the mandates of the Lord Jesus also among them. Whoever perceives the call of the Lord should test the same with the church in prayer and fasting. If he is prepared to consecrate himself unreservedly to the Lord; and if by faith he is ready to accept everything from the Lord; and if in all humility he is willing to lead sinners to Jesus, then he should be of good courage and in the name of Jesus step out, move to the North and witness there by the grace of God.¹³⁴

Six couples, two single men, and one single woman responded and accompanied them to serve among these tribes. But only two of the families and the three singles were able to make cultural adjustments. The others returned home within one year. Those who stayed settled in three centers. They sought to consolidate the work where Benzien, and the Peterses with fellow missionaries, had previously evangelized: Heinrich Wiens and Heinrich Friesen with their wives and a single missionary, Susanna Janzen, established headquarters

¹³³ Johann Peters, "Bericht über das Missionsfeld im Norden Asiens am Obstrom und an den Nebenflüssen," quoted in full by Unruh, Geschichte, pp. 351-365; cf. Fast, In den Steppen Sibiriens, pp. 63-64, 74-75.

¹³⁴ Peters, "Bericht," p. 359.

at Melipulsk. The two single men, W. Berg and Hermann Heinrichs, went along with the old veteran Benzien and the Russian evangelist Tschegaletschik. They moved by canoe northward along the river and settled in Obdorsk. The Peters family stayed in Alexandrowo, where up to fifty believers gathered for fellowship meetings. From here they traveled by sled in winter and canoe in summer to evangelize non-Christians and nurture young Christians in outlying areas.¹³⁵

The Ostjakes had no written language of their own and very few were able to read Russian. This made work notoriously difficult. Yet they were eager to learn and repeatedly asked the missionaries why they had not come much sooner to make known the Good News to the peoples of the Great North. Peters addressed that question in writing to his home churches, saying:

And why do they not know? Have we and our fathers been unfaithful in seeking the lost? Brethren, we have already had religious freedom in the land for nine years. Why, then, are so many [Mennonites] emigrating to America and so few workers entering the mission field of the colossal Northland where we are free to preach the gospel unhindered? These people still sacrifice to idols and exercise sorcery and spirit worship. Men, women and children--the young as well as the old--have fallen prey to such abhorrent vices as drinking, card playing and smoking. Even murder and sexual promiscuity are rampant among them. Therefore, we ought to bring the light of the gospel into this domain of darkness as soon as possible. If we fail, these tribes will perish. One educator on his way through this region has remarked: "They are a people doomed to spiritual and physical death."¹³⁶

The Devil and his servants engage with greater urgency in their mission than do the witnesses of Jesus. He has scattered his deadly poisons with great speed throughout these jungles, and thereby has misguided many poor people to commit vice and murder.

And where are the witnesses of Jesus who fight and work against such vices? Say, where are they? Only a

¹³⁵ Peters, "Bericht," p. 360; Fast also mentions Bergmann (could it be W. Berg?), Vollrat, Jakob Wall, and a blind woman Tina Hübert (a linguistic genius working with Susanna Janzen) as tribal missionaries of the northern frontiers (In den Steppen Sibiriens, pp. 63, 74).

¹³⁶ Peters, "Bericht," p. 361.

few of the many thousands who have been bought with the high price of the Lamb's blood and justified by faith are working among the pagan tribes. And the rest? Are they living for themselves on farms and in business ventures? Is their only ambition to demonstrate how well believers can live in this world as perfectors of the culture? Is that really the purpose of the children of God? Does not the mandate of the exalted Lord demand that the gospel be preached to all nations and the believers wait for the return of the Lord? . . . Servants of God arise, watch, pray and work until he comes.¹³⁷

Missionary Peters also reported that many Orthodox Russians had been exiled to Siberia because they resisted the changes introduced by the new "Patriarch Nikhon"¹³⁸ (should read Tikhon), who headed the Orthodox Church during the first eight years (1917-1925) of the Soviet Regime.¹³⁹ These Russians, according to Peters, were receptive to the gospel. New believers gathered in at least twelve locations. Even though they "rejoice in the light," adds Peters, "There is still much work to be done among them."¹⁴⁰

This is the last report we have of MB mission work in Russia. Whoever reads it is inevitably reminded of the ending of the Book of Acts: ". . . preaching the Kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered" (Acts 28:3).¹⁴¹ While it is obvious that the new religious policies had not yet reached these remote regions of the vast North, it is just as obvious that they soon must have penetrated that area as well, for we know nothing of that work beyond Peters' last report. When the Iron Curtain dropped it concealed from the rest of the world what was transpiring on the stage.

¹³⁷ Peters, "Bericht," p. 363.

¹³⁸ Peters, "Bericht," p. 365.

¹³⁹ See Spinka, The Church in the Soviet Union, pp. 3-50.

¹⁴⁰ Peters, "Bericht," p. 365.

¹⁴¹ Cf. Peters, "Bericht," p. 361.